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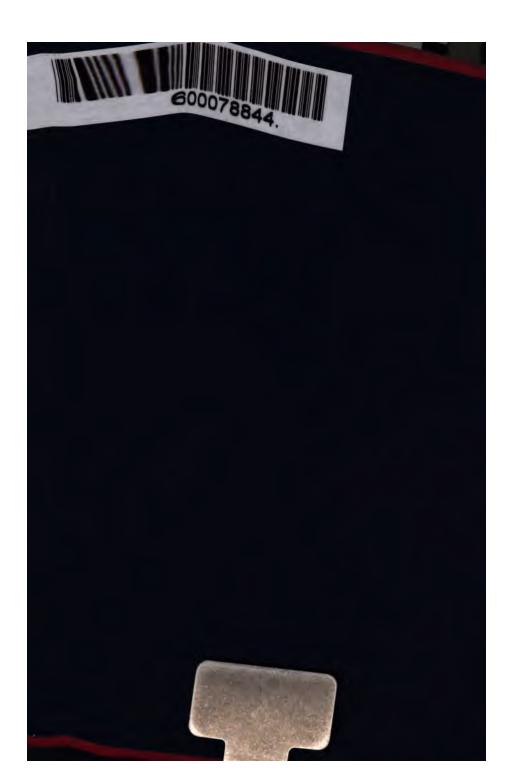
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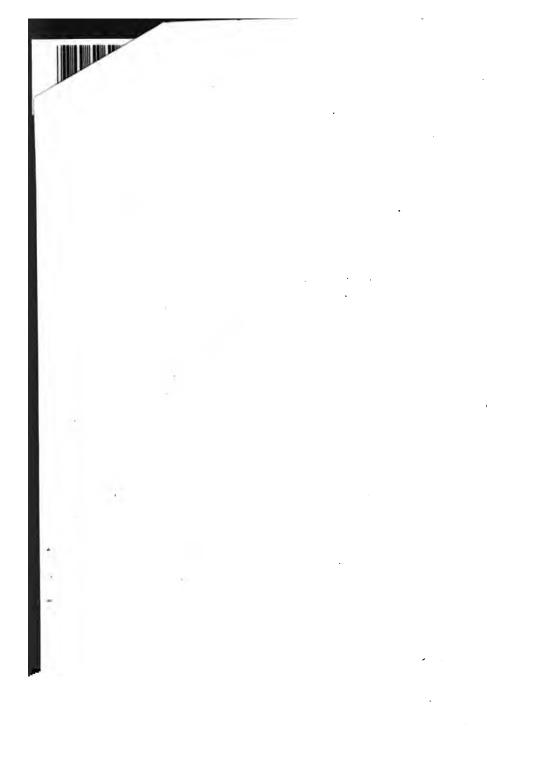
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THE SQUIRE'S COURTSHIP.

VOL. II.

THE SQUIRE'S COURTSHIP. .

BY

MRS. MACKENZIE DANIEL,

AUTHOR OF

"ONE GOLDEN SUMMER,"

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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THE SQUIRE'S COURTSHIP.

CHAPTER I.

THE SPINSTERS IN DISMAY.

"WHY, you have both been as good as gold," said my father, as they drew him into the room and shut the door, having, from excess of agitation, no voices to speak with; "I expected to find you clinging to the banisters, at least; but cheer up, dear ladies. Things are much less grave than they might have been. Miss Earnshaw has no more broken bones or ribs. There is a slight contusion on the chest, and I fear some inward bruising

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that may exercise our patience a little; but unless she has a strong predisposition to lung disease, which appears highly unlikely, I don't think it will entail serious mischief. She must, however, avoid any excitement or fatigue for at least a week, after which I shall be in a position to judge more accurately. As yet she manifests the meekness of a dove" (here Miss Penelope began to sob aloud), "but with a nature like hers this may change at any moment, and I tell you frankly that restlessness, or excess of emotion, would be highly injurious to her. Don't, either of you, go much into her room; never go in tears" (he did not look at Miss Penelope, but as the cap fitted she put it penitently on, gagging herself with an antimacassar); "let the child have as much nourishment as she can take—let her maid sit up with her to-night—I must speak to her for five

minutes—and to-morrow I will be with you early."

Then, firmly declining all the good things on the table except a glass of milk, he shook hands with the sisters and proceeded to his brief interview with Mildred's own servant before taking his departure, advising me to stay with our friends till it was time to come home and give him his dinner.

This I did, because I thought my being with them would keep them from Mildred, but I had to allow each to go in turn to give "the poor darling one kiss, and to hearten her up after the terrific ordeal she had just gone through." I think they were both the better and the brighter for this indulgence, though they said Mildred looked fearfully white and exhausted, and had responded very faintly to all their loving, sympathising words.

It was noticeable and quite characteristic of these most sweet-natured of all sweet-natured spinsters, that they never, from first to last, even hinted at a reproach to their wayward charge, for having brought her suffering and peril upon herself. It sufficed that she was in pain and weakness to make them utterly forget that had she only been advised by all her friends, and kept the promises they had more than once exacted from her, the whole misfortune and its results would have been averted.

At the end of a week, during which I had each day, at her own special request, spent an hour or two with her (she declaring that her aunts, and even Mrs. Radcliff, who came constantly, entirely lacked my soothing influence)—at the end of a week the broken arm was progressing very favourably, but the bruised chest was worse, and had entailed a cough which I

could see my father regarded somewhat anxiously, though, whenever I pressed him to say what he feared from it, he would only reply provokingly, "I am not yet in a position to give a definite opinion, Conny, but your friend is a bad subject for a settled cough."

One day, however, after spending quite twenty minutes by the bedside of his patient, he came down into the parlour where I had joined the spinsters, and nearly threw those mild ladies into convulsions by a piece of advice he abruptly and seriously gave. It was no less than that they should, in a week or two, as soon as Mildred could safely travel, shut up Abbeygates, or leave it in charge of their servants, and take their niece to Pau or Mentone for the Winter. All that had come before in the way of domestic revolutions, of startling changes, of terrors.

anxieties, and distress, seemed light in comparison with this. Leave Abbeygates, where they had been planted from their earliest years, where they were as firmly rooted as the oldest of their venerable garden-trees, or as the ivy upon the crumbling outer walls? Leave their beloved, and comfortable, and respectable English home for a dirty foreign town, infested with vermin, and banditti, and papists, and every other imaginable horror? Surely dear Dr. Newton was not in earnest! Surely they were not to be given over, in their declining age, to a fate so hard and cruel as this!

As usual, Miss Lamb had been the spokeswoman, and though I have not rendered her agitated protest verbatim, I have faithfully expressed the spirit of it, as far as any words can do justice to such very strong feelings as they were designed to convey.

Miss Penelope endorsed the whole by a mournful shaking of her head, which set her pretty silver-grey curls and her little fat, rosy cheeks in motion, too, and imparted to her general aspect an effect that was both curious and pathetic.

When the elder sister came to a full stop, my father, who had been getting a trifle impatient, replied briefly—

"My good ladies, I am grieved to have troubled you to so serious an extent. I spoke professionally, and in the interest of my patient. She may get on in this climate if we have a mild Winter, but she would certainly get on better and faster in a warmer one. Any recently-published guide-book would dispel your fears as to banditti—I won't answer for your not falling in now and then with papists and vermin; but I must leave the matter in your hands. Miss Earnshaw's case is not

bad enough for me to insist. I have only advised."

"Oh, we must go, of course," said Miss Lamb, in a voice which, if a little sepulchral, was tolerably resigned now. "That dear child's health is paramount to all things, even to the very lives of two fading old women like my sister and myself. I hope you will forgive me, dear Dr. Newton, for having spoken warmly on first being made acquainted with your wishes. We will talk it over together, and no doubt we shall get used to the idea by the time the great change is to be made. Dear, dear, only to think, and Christmas close at hand!"

This last ejaculatory plaint was uttered as my father went hastily out of the door, and was addressed to no one in particular. Miss Penelope said nothing, but she sighed in her tender, plaintive way, and crossed

the room to sit by her distressed sister, while I, believing it would be a relief to them both to talk over the matter together, left them silently, and returned to Mildred.

The relations between the latter and myself had materially changed since the accident. It seemed natural enough that I should grow tenderer and more indulgent towards Mildred in her weakness and helplessness, but I could not so easily account for her daily-increasing clinging to me—a clinging that partook of a familiar and caressing attachment, mingled with a looking up, a sort of reverence, that humbled rather than exalted me in my own esteem.

"You know," she would sometimes say, holding my hand tightly pressed in hers, "I always admired you from the first—even when I enjoyed contradicting, teasing, or shocking you. Your calmness and

sweetness often sobered me, while I refused to show any signs of being sobered. And you have been so good to me lately, Constance, darling " (we had given up the formal "Miss" in our intercourse by this time), "that I cannot help loving you dearly, and wishing you could be always with me. It pleases me, too, to believe that you care a tiny bit for me in return."

"More than a tiny bit," I could truthfully assure her, for the Mildred lying here, pale and patient, and grateful for every word and act of kindness, was quite another being from the Mildred of her healthful, prosperous days. And then she would brighten up, and declare that she was reconciled to her condition, since it had procured her the liking she should never have gained without being brought to grief.

But though to me this odd, wayward girl was invariably gentle, affectionate, and docile, I found from others that she could still, on occasions, exhibit the old spirit of wilful recklessness and insubordination, that fever fits of wild impatience would at intervals beset her, causing those in attendance on her—the poor aunts especially—the most wearing anxiety, and obliging them not unfrequently to send abruptly for my father. It was no wonder that, his time being so precious, he should think it desirable to ensure this slowly-mending invalid a speedy change.

When Mildred heard, however, of the project, and gathered that the sisters were breaking their poor hearts over the thought of their banishment from Abbeygates, she vehemently protested against the removal, adding that if she was to die she would rather die at home, and that it

was very cruel of her dear doctor to want to send her out of the country when he could do nothing more for her in it.

My father only smiled at her railing, but the genuine despair of the meek old ladies made a deeper impression on him, and he set to work upon an idea that had suggested itself to his ever-toiling brain, and of which he gave no hint to anyone till, long after, it had borne the fruit he intended.

It took us all by surprise when one day Mrs. Radcliff suddenly appeared at Abbeygates and announced that she and Mr. Radcliff had decided on spending the Winter in Italy, that Miss Mullett would be glad of a holiday, and that it would give her (Mrs. Radcliff) sincere pleasure if Miss Earnshaw would accompany them.

I shall not easily forget the excitement

at Abbeygates that afternoon. Mildred was just able to get up now, and to sit or lie by her bedroom fire, while her aunts or myself—sometimes all three—contributed to her amusement by reading aloud or simply chatting to her, or, on her best days, listening to her voluble and incessant talking.

She had been talking a great deal on the occasion in question, silencing her aunts whenever they attempted to broach the foreign scheme, encouraging, by the most ludicrous pictures, their apprehensions of banditti and vermin, declaring that every foreigner in every grade of life went about armed with a stiletto, which it was a mere chance if he did not plunge into the breast of any stray Englishman or Englishwoman he happened to meet, further stating seriously that frogs and snails were the universal substitutes for

meat, and that parched peas took the place of potatoes and all other vegetables.

Miss Lamb, who believed quite half of all this nonsense, just because the whole teaching of her youth and prejudices of her maturer age disposed her to mistrust utterly whatever was not purely British, had listened to her niece with an awestricken expression of countenance, faithfully though feebly reflected in that of her sister, and was beginning to reckon up how many hampers and cases of wholesome English provisions they could take with them (the chances of death at the hands of Italian desperadoes the poor lady had long ago acquiesced in), when Mrs. Radcliff, laden as she usually was, with hothouse fruit and flowers for the invalid, was announced, and took her seat amongst us.

In a very few minutes the primary

object of her visit was disclosed, and our little circle thrown into a state of wonder and flutter and delight impossible to describe. Of course I exclude myself, to whom it could make no great difference whether Mildred went away with her aunts or with the Radcliffs, though in the latter case there would be no festival at the Grange at Christmas, and I suppose that, in common with nearly all my neighbours, I had been looking forward to this—just a little.

Perhaps Mrs. Radcliff was under the impression that I had been looking forward to it a great deal, for while the spinsters and Mildred were pouring forth their thanks and their unbounded satisfaction at the new and delightful prospect opened to the latter, the lady of the Grange turned suddenly to me, and, with her most gracious smile, said,

"The only regret I have in going away just now is the necessity it entails of foregoing our usual Christmas gathering. I am quite sorry that you and your good father, Miss Newton, will not see the Grange in its Christmas dress. It is really bright and pretty then, for we make the whole house a bower of crimson holly and of greenery. But I need a change this year, and Mr. Radcliff is good enough to desire me to have it. My son, I hope, will join us in Rome, which will be our first halting-place."

Our eyes met as she said these last words, and I was thankful to know that mine fronted hers steadily and calmly. What was it to me that Gilbert Radcliff would spend his Winter in Italy? Had he come to the Grange for Christmas as he expected to do, I should probably have seen him once or twice, had a few kind

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and friendly words from him—I knew he liked me and thought well of me—and then once more have said good-bye and have missed a ray of sunshine out of my quiet life—only because it was so quiet, and had so limited an arena of external interests.

But I am nearly sure Mrs. Radcliff rejoiced in her heart over what she believed to be my disappointment at the change in the family plans. Innocent as I was in the matter of her son having distinguished me by a kindly notice, while he totally overlooked the superior claims of the brilliant heiress, the fact created in the ambitious mother's mind a strong animus against me, and she could never resist an opportunity, such as the present one afforded, of trying to betray me into some exhibition of a consciousness which would have shamed myself and justi-

fied, in a measure, her unreasonable suspicions.

I forgot, however, both our little unspoken skirmish and the origin of it, in listening, after Mrs. Radcliff's departure, to Mildred's childish and extravagant ecstasies at what was before her, and at the spinsters' wondering comments on her suddenly changed views in respect of Continental advantages. For themselves, it was easy to see that, in spite of all their love for their niece, and willingness to make any sacrifice on her account, their satisfaction in the new arrangement was unbounded, being only qualified by a fear, natural to such tender and sensitive consciences, that they were selfish and ignoble in rejoicing over their own exemption from evils to which their poor Mildred and her kind friends were to be exposed.

But Mildred told them seriously that people who kept a carriage, and lived in the style the Radcliffs lived, were in no danger from banditti, and that, being familiar, as they were, with the Continent, and having a staff of men-servants at command, they might be able to procure other food than snails and frogs. She was sure that in Rome maccaroni, and even artichokes, were to be had by those who could afford to pay a high price for such delicacies.

"My dear love," said Miss Lamb, with a look that was perhaps meant to be reproachful, but was simply a little tenderly deprecating, "we know you have been quizzing us, and our ignorance of foreign customs, from the beginning; but we forgive you in our sympathy with your present gladness, and, to speak frankly, in Abbeygates in our old age. At Christmas time, too, when we try to lighten the hardships of our poor and infirm neighbours, who would have missed us—I say it with all humility—after the usages of so many years. Dear, dear!" concluded this simple, guileless soul, "how good our Heavenly Father is to us! I wish we could be more submissive and grateful!"

Mildred either grew better in reality, or was kept up by her high spirits from this time. Her great desire was to be in Rome before Christmas, and Mrs. Radcliff was only waiting my father's permission for his patient to make a move, to give the marching orders. I was with Mildred still every day, helping her in whatever she had to do, listening patiently, and often in genuine amusement, to her wild anticipations of enjoyment, occasionally trying to

tone down her enthusiasm, but always (by reason of her childlike leaning upon me) sympathizing heartily in what was natural and comprehensible of her demonstrative gladness.

"Of course I shall miss you cruelly," she often said, breaking off in the midst of some extravagant flight of fancy, or some grave deliberation on the subject of her many elegant new dresses; "and I am awfully afraid that when your quiet influence is withdrawn, I shall do all sorts of naughty things again. You may smile, Constance, darling, but it is quite true that you do influence me, and that, as long as I am near you, I would not vex or grieve you by showing the cloven foot, which was born with me, and which I shall never be rid of, for a kingdom. One thing, however, I may promise. Though separated from my good angel by thousands of miles,

by sea and land, which, it may be, I shall never cross again to find her, I will not prove a traitor by trying, even for a week's pastime, to win the heart of that great red-bearded Geraint, whom she knows, and I know, to be too honest and sober-minded for me. Still men are men, you sweet, serene, unblushing wonder, and he and I may be thrown much together; so my promise is not quite so idle as it seemson my part, who must have game of some kind to hunt down, I mean, and to whom, but for somebody I love and honour far more, the young bonny giant in question would be tempting prey, if only for his saucy coldness and indifference to my attractions."

And whenever it was Mildred's whim to talk in this way, I would tell her calmly that she would be doing me no wrong in seeking to win Gilbert Radcliff's heart, and, moreover, that, believing it to be a heart worth winning, I would rather commend the task to her, if she could give her own heart in return.

"But I could not," she would lightly declare, "for he is not a bit like a hero, and I must have a real hero when I have a real lover. At present I have given my heart to you, and I am sure you will take better care of it than any man in the universe."

"It is a grave charge, Mildred," I told her; "but I do begin to feel something like a mother to you, and it will always seem natural for me to watch over your happiness and well-doing."

The travelling-party went off the week before Christmas, and though the dear old ladies at Abbeygates had the pleasure of dispensing all their annual charities, and though I had found plenty of neglected home work to occupy me, not to mention a renewal of my visits to poor Mrs. Graham, we all missed, to an extent that surprised us, the bright, restless, ever-varying spirit to which we had grown accustomed, and whose very faults and caprices had kept us so long from stagnation.

The Winter was not an especially severe one, but it wore away slowly to me after Mildred's departure, and I longed every day, nearly every hour, for the coming of the Spring, for the sunshine and the budding leaves, for the nameless something—call it hope shrouded in a silver mist—which, to the young, and occasionally even to those who have left youth behind, the sweet Spring-time brings with it.

I did not guess that this Spring the turtles and the nightingales were preparing for me a new song, in the strange wonder of which I should fall asleep and dream that the earth's blight had for ever passed away, and been succeeded by a golden haze of unfading brilliance and beauty.

CHAPTER II.

THE HEIRESS SUGGESTS A DISGUISE.

HAD been confined to the house for more than a fortnight by a severe cold in the latter part of the month of February, and, being unused to illness of my own, I had chafed a good deal under the mildest medical treatment, railing at my father's drugs, and protesting every day that I would take no more of them.

One morning, seeing that the sun was shining pleasantly outside, I turned rebellious altogether, got up against orders, and went down to breakfast.

"It is no use, papa," I said, as the dear man was beginning a serious remonstrance. "I was never cut out for an invalid, and you know I don't believe to a great extent in physic—not even in yours, though you do contrive to make it as little objectionable as possible. I am going to the Grahams by-and-by. It is ages since I have seen them or heard a word about poor Evelyn."

"Poor Evelyn is very far on the road to the land of the leal, Conny," said my father gravely and sadly, "and because of this I will not forbid your walking up there to-day. Mrs. Graham may like to open her mother's heart to you—God help her! it is a sorely stricken heart already, and the worst has to come. But you must be home early, my dear," he added, "for your cough is not half well yet, and Miss Brown spends every night now at Wood-

leigh to share the watching and nursing with the worn-out mother."

"Oh, papa, and you never told me," I exclaimed, with a deep pity stirring all my pulses. "Though I could not have gone, I might, at least, have sent a word of sympathy. What must Mrs. Graham have thought of me!"

"My dear, she knows I have been keeping you in ignorance of the true state of affairs since you have been laid by yourself. Her grief is of too overwhelming a nature to make human sympathy as yet of any value to her; otherwise, comfort would have flowed in on every side. All her neighbours, even those who have hitherto never liked the Grahams, manifest now the utmost kindness and pity, and have been untiring in their offers of help. Our dear old ladies have constantly driven over and taken delicacies for the child; nearer

neighbours have done the same; but, above all, that poor, plodding woman, the vicar's daughter, has proved a devoted friend, never heeding weather, never sparing herself, ready night or day to give her services in any capacity, and always refusing, in her brusque way, to be even thanked for what she does. Poor Miss. Brown! she is one of the world's gems, Conny, and yet, for want of a little polish in the shape of a gracious manner, she scarcely passes as a good crystal. don't like her or do her justice, while she is freely sacrificing herself for the benefit of those around her. There are not many who, being denied life's best and brightest gifts, accept patiently their cold, hard lot, and throw their whole interest into the joys and griefs of others as she does. You see, Conny, I have made a sort of study of this admirable but unappreciated woman—

(By-the-by, what a striking contrast she is to Miss Mullett, who has grown bitter and savage under life's denials, and esteems no destiny so cruel as her own!)-and I am glad to publish the result of my investiga-It is a pity her father is not more like her, but I am afraid he thinks the · colour and shape of his pansies and dahlias of infinitely greater importance than the souls or bodies of his flock. They say he spends quite half his handsome stipend on his model garden, and you see how that poor woman dresses. I verily believe she gives away two-thirds of what the selfish old man allows her."

"Well, papa," I was tempted to say, as my usually taciturn companion stopped abruptly and swallowed down one of his preposterous cups of tea, "Miss Brown has, at any rate, a warm and zealous advocate in you. I don't think I ever

heard you praise a woman so much before."

"I daresay not, Conny, because usually if a woman is deserving of praise, there will be found plenty to praise her. Now, nobody, as far as I know, has a word of commendation for the vicar's unattractive daughter, and that is why, having been a frequent eye-witness of her unostentatious deeds, I have taken up the cudgels on her behalf."

"You precious old man!" I exclaimed, leaving my chair to go and give him a hearty kiss. "Don't you believe that I admire you for your championship, and think as highly of Miss Brown as you do? Only," I added, with a sudden mischievous desire to tease him a little, "if she is to be my stepmother, give me fair warning. I am sure she would need my assistance in making her trousseau."

"Conny," he laughed, and I failed to see even the ghost of a blush—"you shall have some more of my physic if you talk such nonsense." Then quite seriously—"I give you my word, my dear, I should consider it the height of presumption, on my part, for all her plainness and for all her faded crumpled gowns, to ask so good a woman to marry me."

I think I pursed up my lips a little at this, but I had no further remark to make, and we separated to our respective duties almost immediately after.

Just as I was starting, two or three hours later, for my walk to Woodleigh, the second post, with foreign letters, came in, and brought me a long and interesting epistle from Mildred. She had been very good hitherto in writing to me, and had always expatiated, in her gushing style, on the attractions of Rome, on the gaieties in which

she and her friends largely mingled, and on the charming English people they everywhere met. But as, interpersed with all this were long passages devoted to her yearnings for me to share her enjoyments, and still longer ones expressive of the growth-in absence-of her profound attachment to her "good angel," the first letters had not supplied me with many details of her daily life, and I was therefore glad to find that the sixteen gossamer pages now in my possession appeared to have more of narrative and information, and less of mere sentimentalism, in them. however, only quote one moderately brief passage which I read, with frequent smiles, as I walked along. It occurred after a lively description of a grand ball they had just attended, where Mildred had evidently been the star of the evening, and, either from her own charms or the report of her

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wealth, the observed of all observers.

"It was splendid fun, you know," she wrote—"to be made so much of, though I had wit enough to be aware all the time that in nine cases out of ten it was the golden calf, and not me, in my really perfect toilette, that these professedly devoted slaves of mine were worshipping. I took a keen delight in chaffing and snubbing them all, but the more I chaffed and snubbed the more they fawned and Had I given the least encourageflattered. ment. I should have had at least half a hundred hearts laid at my feet before the night was over. Hearts, did I say?—such hearts! Oh my wise, pure, unworldly Constance, how you would loathe being a rich woman if it brought you acquainted with the infinite littleness of mankind. what do you think I am going to do? It is quite a splendid idea, and Mrs. Radcliff,

though she calls me a foolish child, and advises me to take the world as I find it (which unfortunately I must, since nobody is likely to create me a better), condescends to be amused in the anticipation of my It is just this. In the next scheme. place we stay at, which I believe will be Florence, I intend dropping the heiress, and passing as Mrs Radcliff's humble companion. It has been her fault, not mine, that my future wealth has ever got noised abroad. She likes the éclat of taking about a girl who, in addition to her swarthy skin and piquant originality (this is really how I am sometimes described), has a mint of money to back up her personal charms. But we shall see now how ces messieurs will regard me when I figure in coarse white muslin and a cheap ribbon sash as Mrs. Radcliff's hired companion. I am setting Lisette to work upon my dresses, and we

are all having immense fun over it, even Mr. Radcliff being tickled with the idea of my coming out in a part which must be made up chiefly of quietness and subservience. I believe Mrs. R. has written a full account of our plan to Gilbert, a last temptation to induce him to join our party; but he won't come—the obstinate, ungallant bear!—because I am here, and he knows his maternal parent is crazy for him to marry me.

"You remember that Mrs. Radcliff told us, on the day she invited me to come abroad with them, that her son was to join us at Christmas—well, that was pure invention, as I have since discovered, and its twofold object to please *me* and to vex *you*, my sweet unassailable Constance.

"But I scarcely understand how, with his respect and affection for his mother, he can continue to hold out against her re-

peated appeals to him. I must be a very repulsive object indeed in his eyes to nerve him to such firmness. And oh, my darling! this brings me back to my old point of lamentation—the grievous, humiliating, crushing belief that nobody ever will care for me as I want to be cared for. sure I could adore a shoeblack or a chimney-sweep (in their washed intervals), if I had the solemn conviction that a member of either of these honourable professions loved me for my own worth alone. In the meanwhile, I can only amuse myself by teasing the men who pay their absurd court to me, and whom, luckily, I could no more fall in love with than they could entertain a serious attachment to me. Mrs. Radcliff calls me a coquette, and adds that coquettes are never impressionable themselves. But impressionable or not, my Constance, I have spoken the pure truth in saying that my hitherto untouched heart is ready for the acceptance of any son of Adam who could feel that I was the one woman in the world for him."

"Pcor, candid Mildred!" I said to myself, as, after a second reading of her letter, I folded it and put it safely away in my pocket—"it is easy to see that, in spite of the merry jesting tone she has adopted in speaking of her little romantic scheme, there is a latent hope underlying it all that the dream-hero will appear before the play is played out, and that she will have the satisfaction and bliss of endowing some disinterested son of Adam—'soldier, sailor, tinker, tailor,'—no matter which, with the rich red English gold he has never even suspected."

Then I began, by a natural sequence of ideas, to think of Gilbert Radcliff, and almost to condemn him for not heeding his

mother's strongly expressed wishes. Surely he was not so weak as to fear being drawn, by parental influence or persuasion, into marriage with a girl he could not like, and surely, apart from this, poor Mildred, even with the aroma of eastern sandal-wood he detested about her, could not be so utterly repulsive to him that he should shrink from living for a few weeks under the same roof with her.

My very interest in this young man and warm appreciation of what I knew of his character, combined with a strong love of justice inherent in myself, inclined me to be vexed with him for what seemed to me a failure of affectionate duty on his part; and moralizing on human selfishness even in the best specimens of our fallen race, and wishing vaguely I could know more of Gilbert's motives and excuses for keeping from his family, I arrived at Woodleigh

before I was aware of the distance I had come.

There was a little flutter at my heart in anticipation of the sorrow I might be called on to witness, without the power to soothe, as I passed quickly through the little shrubbery, bare and leafless now, conducting to the house, where, as I stood at length, tired and rather faint, under the verandah shading the front door, I heard, to my astonishment, the sound of the organ in the library—not played with Mrs Graham's sweet but gentle touch, which only drew forth half the instrument's strength and beauty, but struck evidently by a master-hand of unusual skill and power, inspired by some inward spirit to which music must be the natural outlet for all its deep human sympathies and passionate human yearnings.

CHAPTER III.

POOR EVELYN! POOR MOTHER!

THE bell which I had pulled softly and timidly, not knowing what might be going on within, was answered, after the lapse of a minute or two (during which that wondrous music held me spell-bound), by Evelyn's old Irish nurse, whose eyes were red from recent crying, and whose voice, when she began to speak, was broken by hardly suppressed sobbings.

"Eh, my dear Miss Newton," she said, when I had made my trembling, half choking inquiries, and she had led me into the first empty room on the side of the

hall and drawn a chair for me to sit on, "but it is the house of mourning you've come to to-day, and no mistake! That blessed lamb has been dying since midnight, and the poor missis—may the dear Lord have mercy on her !—is just off her head, and will be fit for nothing but the county 'sylum when all's over. She have never spoke, nor took no notice of anyone but the child, these last four hours, though master kisses and fondles her, and cries over her himself, as if they were both babies, that he do. And then we've had Miss Brown with us all night—a rare one she be, too, though no soft words nor blarney to be spared in that quarter; and there's our old doctor come from over the seas, I do believe I've heard them say, just to please little missy, who was always crying out for her dear 'Eber, bless her loving heart! and she nearly an angel this identical

minute. But as I was telling you, miss (and, oh! I'm right glad you've come), the missis is actually crazed with grief, and is fast falling, the others think, into what master calls a stupor, though I don't rightly know what that is, and only guess it's something awful bad and fearsome. The doctor, who arrived late last night and slept here, has been trying his music since breakfast as a means of rousing her, for she dearly loved his playing in the old days, which, you may judge for yourself, miss, is quite 'eavenly. But eh, dear! he might as well be screeching on them horrid Scotch bagpipes, for all the notice she takes of his performance!--and as for the blessed lamb who is a-departing, though she smiles beautiful, when her breath will let her, and they think she is hearing Dr. Marsden's organ from downstairs, it's my belief she is hearing angel's music up

above, and that they are playing and singing her welcome home, which we do all know, miss, is 'a land of pure delight,' as Dr. Watts says, 'where saints immortal reign!' But, eh, dear, I'm letting my old chattering tongue run on, when I ought to be thinking of how we can make your coming of use to the missis. She's mighty fond of you, as I've heard master say, and it may be your pleasant face and kind-like voice will waken her up a bit, if we can get you into the room without warning. Perhaps, however, I ought to ask Dr. Marsden how we'd best manage it. I''be after going and fetching him, if you'll wait here a minute."

"Oh! please don't, nurse," I said eagerly, laying my hand restrainingly upon the old woman's arm. "I don't know Dr. Marsden. I don't want to see him. Let me go with you at once to Evelyn's room. The

parents will not mind me; and, as you say, the poor mother may be roused by the sight of a familiar face which she has missed, through my own illness, for some time. Anyhow, we can try this, and I should like to look once more upon that sweet child, whose tender heart was so full of love for everybody. Shall we come, nurse?"

"Eh, by all manner of means," responded the faithful creature, wiping her eyes hard with her apron, at my allusion to Evelyn; "but I'm thinking we ought to have just spoke to the doctor, who wouldn't make himself no stranger to you, miss, having the prettiest manners I ever see in any gentleman; but maybe you're shy, and so we'll come along on our own 'sponsibility, and blaming nobody else, if it turn out otherwise than we mean it to."

With which trite climax to her naïve

speech, my companion preceded me softly upstairs, opening the door of the room we were bound for, and pushing me gently in before I had time to rally my courage, or to think of any words in which to address a mother whose last child was being slowly lifted from her vainly-clinging arms for ever.

I can still see plainly before my eyes the scene on which I so abruptly intruded. The half-darkened room, the little white-curtained bed, supporting a small, pure, wax-like figure, with tangled golden hair veiling nearly half the angel face, a face undisturbed by a shadow of pain, though the breath was coming in short, fitful gasps, which it was easy to predict would soon waste whatever life remained in the poor little perishing body.

Then, kneeling, or half crouching beside the bed, with the look almost of a wild animal in her fixed, dilated eyes, was the poor mother, her arms spread over the counterpane, her head bent towards the evidently unconscious child, her whole aspect stern and defiant, suggesting almost that she was contending with Death for the possession of her last and dearest earthly blessing.

Finally, there was the scarcely less afflicted husband and father, sitting in dumb patience, as it seemed, on a chair behind his wife, watching her even more than he watched his child, but holding both, I could well believe, in his large, loving heart, and grieving that he could not help them by taking their sorrows upon himself, in addition to his own.

All this came upon me as a distinct vision in the first few seconds of my standing within the mournful room. Perhaps my imagination was quickened by those strains of soft ravishing music which floated up through the open library door, and added immeasurably to the solemnity and weirdness of the whole tragic scene.

I could easily have deluded myself with the notion that I had been transported suddenly into a land of shadows, or that I had fallen asleep and was dreaming a sad strange dream, had not Colonel Graham sprung up instantly on recognising me, and come to greet me with eagerly extended hands.

"The very friend I should have sent for had I thought she was well enough to obey the summons," he said, in a low and not particularly steady voice. "Our dark hour is upon us, you see, and my poor Mary has not yet been able to lay hold upon the strength waiting for her, as I know she will do by-and-by. It was no use sending for your poor overworked

father," he added, still holding my trembling hands; "for, besides that there is nothing to be done for that suffering lamb, we have our old friend Marsden here, and he can look after both mother and child. Will you sit and rest a minute or two, my dear Miss Newton, for you look like a ghost yourself, or shall I go out for a bit while you try at once what you can do with my poor Mary?"

By this time I was wrought up to the highest pitch of nervous excitement, and fearing that I might soon break down altogether, I said that I would be left now, if he liked, though I had small hope of succeeding in doing good where he and her old friend Dr. Marsden had failed.

"Oh," he replied, with a man's eagerness to catch at the faintest straw in the waves that are threatening to engulph him, "there is nothing like a woman to comfort a woman in her hour of extremest need. Poor Miss Brown has zeal and tenderest compassion, but she offers these refreshments in a vessel of such rude manufacture that the objects of her ministerings mostly refuse to drink, or drink too reluctantly to be benefited by the potion. Now my poor wife thinks all the world of you, and you certainly have the secret of reaching hearts. Try your best—I know you will—with this breaking one to-day."

Then he went out, and I threw aside my walking things and took his place silently behind the still rigid and unobservant mother.

For some minutes no change of any kind occurred. The child lay gasping forth its little life, the mother knelt watching, in an agony no human words can describe, the stealthily approaching

footsteps of the destroyer, and I, in my helplessness and futile sympathy, watched them both, and listened to the divine music below, as if that could inspire me with skill and wisdom to administer consolation.

Presently I noticed that Evelyn's breath was growing shorter and quicker, while round the half shut eyes deepened that nameless shadow which is one of Death's surest heralds. Then I knelt beside my fellow-watcher; I encircled her waist with my arm; I called her tenderly by her name, and I entreated her to look at and speak to me. After a second or two, she did turn those terrible eyes full upon my face, and I was certain she knew me, though it seemed impossible to her to put any ideas she might have into language.

"Your precious one will soon be blooming in paradise," I whispered, making a bold thrust into the very centre of her quivering heart. "Can you not find some ray of comfort in the thought that she will have gained, in proportion, infinitely, inconceivably more than you will have lost?"

Words—empty, meaningless words, as far as she to whom they were spoken were concerned. The tearless eyes had already wandered back to the dying child, the whole being of the stricken woman—heart, soul, intellect—were merged for the time in that frail atom of humanity, which, in a few fleeting moments, would belong to humanity no longer.

"Dearest Mrs. Graham," I said, returning to my apparently hopeless task, as I saw how very near the end had come, and still keeping my arm folded tightly round her, "will you not, for your husband's sake, whom I must call now, try to rouse yourself a little—will you not——"

She turned sharply, wresting herself

from my encircling arm with a half-frenzied impatience.

"Why must you call him now?" she cried, in a voice so shrill and unnatural that it absolutely terrified me. "You see no change—she is not worse—she may get better yet! My angel cannot be leaving me for ever!"

"Not for ever," I said, in a low, shaking tone; for, indeed, this wild mother, in her mortal anguish, was quite too much for me. "You will find her again by-and-by—and you cannot tell how soon—with your other lost treasures, in the land of the blest, where there will be no more partings. Oh! if you could fix your thoughts on that moment instead of on this, or if you could cling simply to a Father's loving hand, it would lead you safely out of your present terrible darkness—"

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I stopped here, as a frantic cry broke upon the blank stillness of the room, and the mother, dragging herself in all her feebleness from her crouching posture, fell prone upon the body of her dead child—hers no longer, God help her! but one of the bright angelic host walking the golden streets—one of the sweet immortal flowers wreathed for ever in the Redeemer's crown.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN WITH THE LONGFELLOW FACE.

MY first instinct was to rush to the bell and pull it violently, but all downstairs had heard that piercing cry, and Colonel Graham, followed by Dr. Marsden, was in the room before I could get back to the bedside, or collect my scattered senses sufficiently to decide what ought to be my own next move in this over-mournful drama.

As for the poor mother, exhausted nature had come to her rescue for the moment, for when her husband lifted her, unresisting now, from the body of her

dead child, it was discovered that she was quite unconscious, and they carried her gently away between them, leaving me with the little beauteous marble corpse.

It was so beautiful, so pure, so life-like still, suggesting only a child slumber, profound and incapable of disturbance, that I could not remove my fascinated gaze from those snowy pillows, and what they were supporting. I seemed, under the influence of the excitement I was passing through, to be endued with some new faculty of apprehending things with a clearness I had never before experienced.

My straining vision sought to follow Evelyn to the bright home she had triumphantly entered, and so highly were my feelings wrought that I could believe I heard strains of glorious music, and saw angel bands, in white apparel, passing to and fro on the glassy sea. Then I was

abruptly conscious of becoming faint and dizzy, and my next distinct remembrance connected with that ever-memorable day is of finding myself, half sitting, half reclining, upon a chair near an open window, with nurse standing behind me holding a vinaigrette, and a stranger bending over me and feeling my pulse.

"Nothing is the matter with me," I said, straightening myself even to rigidity, and giving one swift glance at the Longfellow face whose features I knew so well, but which I am bound to acknowledge had a winning grace lacking in the portrait I had seen. "How shameful of me to be attracting attention and care by a momentary dizziness at such a time as this! How is Mrs. Graham, nurse?" (I turned round to address the old woman.) "Pray, pray all of you devote your care and sympathies to her."

"She will not be neglected, you may be sure," answered Dr. Marsden, in a softly modulated voice, that must needs have been the attribute of one who could render Handel and Mozart as he rendered them; "but you are just now needing a little care too, Miss Newton, and common humanity dictates that we should give it you. Your long walk, after an illness, as I understand, and the excitement succeeding it, would be quite enough to account for your feeling giddy or faint—and you have had nothing since you came in, for which I have been scolding my old friend, nurse, who ought to have known better. But you must come down and have food and wine now. Poor Mrs. Graham is in her. husband's charge. I have hopes of her being brought into a more natural state, since the worst is over."

All this was said so kindly and so fa-

miliarly, as if the speaker had known me for years, that I should have had no excuse for carping at it, even had the present been a time for carping at anything. But indeed I felt with such keen distress, such anger against myself, the fact of having become a prominent object in the midst of the overwhelming quiet of my stricken friends that, had my prejudice towards Dr. Marsden been tenfold stronger than it was, I must have forgotten it in that exciting moment.

I know too that I could not, under any circumstances, remain where I was, in Evelyn's room, a place so hallowed now that none but those to whom she had been dearest in life should have the privilege of intruding into it. I therefore rose instantly at Dr. Marsden's orders, and said I was ready to come down.

I don't know whether his quick pro-

fessional eye detected that I was rather shaky when I attempted to stand, but he offered me his arm, and I took it from the very necessity of the case, determining to get out of the house as fast as I possibly could, and not to inflict myself and my futility upon my friends again till there was no chance of my being such a nuisance as I had been to-day.

My escort led me into the unoccupied dining-room, bidding nurse, who had followed us, get me refreshments at once, and bidding me, in the slightly peremptory tone which I suppose had become natural to him during the exercise of his profession, take them immediately, and then rest on the sofa for half an hour.

"I shall not need rest, after I have had a glass of wine, thank you," I said; "and as I can certainly be of no use here to-day, I would rather return home as soon as possible. Be kind enough to explain this to Colonel Graham, if he should ask for me, and to tell him I will send over to inquire concerning dear Mrs. Graham, if I am not able to come myself early to-morrow."

"You had better not attempt to come, if you cannot drive," he replied, gently compelling me into an easy chair, and arranging the cushions conveniently behind my back (it would have amused me immensly, under ordinary circumstances, to be treated as a delicate invalid), "but doutless Dr. Newton will be calling to see Mrs. Graham, and if you care to come, you could avail yourself of that opportunity. I shall leave you now, and give your message upstairs. What time do you wish to start for Lidmere?"

"Almost immediately, that is as soon as I have taken a biscuit and a glass of wine. I shall then just get home by daylight. My father begged me not to be late."

He nodded and went out, leaving me with the impression that I had seen the last of him for to-day, with the impression too, that, in my previous judgment of this young man, I had been a little uncharitable and over-hasty. There was no appearance of conceit or affectation about him; rather, on the contrary, a tendency in his manners to a homeliness and familiarity which justified nurse's admiring description of them, but which were not especially attractive to me—only the thought that I had done him injustice inclined me to forbear criticism now, and even to take myself to task for having predetermined to dislike an unoffending individual simply because others liked him so much, and that on his account my father had failed of a warm welcome on his first coming to Lidmere.

When nurse, very penitent for her past

neglect, brought me a tray with wine and sandwiches, she told me that Mrs. Graham had recoverd from her long fainting fit, and that the master would come and speak to me presently.

"But eh, dear!" she added, sobbing between every other word—"though that blessed child is safe in heaven, our trouble ain't over yet. The missis has had her death-blow, if I know anything of signs and tokens, and then, well-a-day, for the poor master, for he loves her as the very apple of his eye."

I was not sorry that somebody called this good woman away before she had time to utter any more dark prophecies. My nerves had received a severe shock, and my depression was deep enough without being added to by melancholy anticipations of the future. When Colonel Graham came to me I tried to say a few words of sympathy, but broke down at the very first sentence, and was only able weakly to press his hands, while he stood before me struggling to set me an example of at least outward composure.

In the end, this brave tender-hearted man, whose whole life had been a life of discipline, gained strength to tell me that his poor Mary knew him at once on coming to consciousness, and though she had not spoken yet, nor been prevailed on to take any kind of restorative, he fancied she had smiled faintly in answer to some imploring and caressing words he had addressed to her, and Dr. Marsden hoped that, by and by, the present dead lethargy would be succeeded by a re-action of natural and healthy emotion. Then he said he should be glad if my father would look in to-morrow, and seeing that I was ready to start he bade me an affectionate farewell

and returned to his post by his bereaved wife. .

I was passing out very noiselessly at the front door, my heart heavier than I can say at the desolation I was leaving behind me, when, to my utter and not pleased astonishment, Dr. Marsden abruptly placed himself at my side, springing from I knew not whence, and saying—

- "Miss Newton, how could you for a moment suppose you would be permitted to leave this house alone?"
- "Why should I not?" I replied, bristling all over with a spirit of independence and self-assertion. "I am not a child, Dr. Marsden, and it is broad daylight, and I am quite familiar with the road home. I beg you will not think of anything so absurd as my requiring an escort. Indeed, I would much rather go alone."
 - "Well, that is candid at least," he said,

with a smile—the first I had seen on his face, and it made it more like Longfellow's than ever; "but, nevertheless, I am going with you. Even if I could be such an ill-mannered boor as to refrain from accompanying you, do you think that Colonel Graham, a gentleman and a soldier, would hear of your returning unprotected, especially in your present weak state? Miss Newton, pray show yourself the sensible young lady I know you are, and acquiesce gracefully in the inevitable."

Here he quietly took my arm within his own, and I could literally do nothing but bite my lips with vexation, and remain stupidly silent.

We walked on thus for a few minutes, during which I felt awkward and uncomfortable to a degree, and had little doubt that my companion was thinking me sulky and ungrateful. At last I said blunderingly—

"I am, of course, very much obliged to you, Dr. Marsden, for your kindness in wishing to take me home; but I hate to give trouble. I have given enough in my friend's house to-day; and when you are wanted so greatly there, it is too preposterous that you, or anybody, should consider it necessary to go a single step with a woman of my age."

"I am sorry to displease you, Miss Newton," he answered, "but I am really acting under orders; and you are unjust in blaming me. Am I walking too fast for you?"

"Oh, dear no," I said quickly. "I can walk faster that this. I am not an invalid. Let us get on at a more rapid rate, that you may be released the sooner, and return to your friends."

For I was idiot enough to be piqued at his last words, and to assume that he had come on compulsion, because he said, being goaded thereto probably by my ungraciousness, that he was acting under orders.

There ensued another long interval of silence, during which the freshening evening wind swept by us with an eerie moaning sound, and the clouds gathered in the west, and the whole external atmosphere seemed to be putting on a mourning garb, as if it sympathised with sorrowing human hearts, and was in haste to fold away the day's unusual brightness.

I was thinking again wholly of Evelyn and of her emancipation from all earth's cares and temptations for ever, when my companion, whose meditations must have been somewhat of the same nature, said abruptly—

"Miss Newton, do you know Mrs.

Browning's 'Little Mattie?' It is a wonderful poem, suggestive of the strangest ideas in connection with death, and the immediate accession of knowledge and wisdom on the soul's awakening in another state. Odd how those verses have haunted me all day! Are they familiar to you?"

"Yes," I replied with interest, for I had remembered them specially this evening, "I know them well, and think them very beautiful; but how marvellous it seems to apply the statement concerning the dead Mattie to our dead Evelyn, to picture that tender, child-like child, suddenly endowed with immortal faculties, and holding equal converse with the highest angels. Do you really believe it is so?"

"I don't know what to believe," he said; "but the speculation attracts and interests me, my mind being of a rather speculative order. Has it ever struck you?" he asked

presently, "how many people one meets in our social intercourse to whom it would be simply ridiculous to speak of things like this?"

"In other words," I replied, "how few people there are who give themselves the trouble to think, even if they attempt, by reading, to acquaint themselves with the thoughts of others. Yes, I have made the discovery, notwithstanding a very limited experience, that the thinkers in our busy world are greatly in the minority, and must be content, for the most part, to dwell metaphorically alone. But even thus, I consider they have, like the world's geniuses—its poets especially—the best of it."

"That is a question," he said, and then we had a long and, to me, deeply interesting discussion on the comparative advantages of a high intellect with keen feeling,

and ordinary intelligence with no undue or inconvenient sensitiveness. Dr. Marsden could argue well and clearly, and he used no redundancy of words to fatigue or mystify his listener. I discovered that he was much of a dreamer and speculator himself; that the mere practical side of life had few charms for him; that it would always be easier for him to admire noble and heroic deeds than to make any special exertion to practise them; that he hated physical trouble or labour; and finally that his ideal of human happiness was something of the sybarite nature—a bed of roses, little to do, plentiful opportunities for communion with kindred minds, and for indulging in his own ever-varying and widening speculations.

It was impossible for a humble dreamer and thinker like myself not be drawn, after a fashion, towards a character such as this; but I was only intellectually drawn as yet. I did not, in my heart, yield the highest admiration or approval to people who lived for their own enjoyment, even though that enjoyment excluded all merely animal luxuries, and consisted of mental food of the most refined and dainty kind. I knew that a vast amount of unsuspected selfishness was often associated with such apparently elevated characteristics as I am describing, and that the simple, unostentatious worker and doer of loving deeds was, in most cases, devoid of unusual mental capacity.

But for all this there was very keen and rare enjoyment to be got out of intercourse with a man of cultivated intellect and original thought like Dr. Marsden—he had not been gifted with a Longfellow physiognomy for nothing—and I was constrained to acknowledge to myself, on arriving at

the end of our walk, that, in spite of the saddening impressions clinging to me from the day's experiences, I had been lifted into a new world of imagination and beauty, and that I owed my novel pleasure to the man I had rashly predetermined to hate, and who even yet I only forgave and tolerated because of his mental endowments.

My father was not at home, so I did not even ask Dr. Marsden to come in. They would probably meet to-morrow at Woodleigh, and anyhow I wanted quiet and rest now, and I was sure he must be in a hurry to get back to his afflicted friends.

He shook hands in a very friendly way at parting, and mystified me a little by saying as he did so—

"I am glad to find the portrait I have been amusing myself for some months past in drawing, from a series of sketches supplied to me, a tolerably correct one. I love the study of individual character, Miss Newton, especially of a woman's character. Cannot you imagine how interesting it must be to fit disjointed pieces of such a puzzle together, till you have made up a perfectly harmonious whole?"

"Yes," I answered; "for I delight in the study of any original character myself; but I don't in the least understand what your first statement implies. Perhaps you did not mean it to be intelligible."

"Perhaps not, for to-night, at any rate," he answered, with the smile I wished I could think less winning; "but I will explain when we meet again. Now go in and rest, for you need it more than you will admit, and if you feel well enough ask your father to bring you to Woodleigh and poor Mrs. Graham to-morrow."

I went in gladly, but my mind was in far too great a chaos for rest; and on my father's return I had to give him a detailed history of the long sad day's experiences.

CHAPTER V.

DR. MARSDEN MAKES A MORNING CALL UPON ME.

"CONNY," said my father, as we met in the breakfast-room the next morning, "I shall be able to make Woodleigh my second place of call to-day, therefore I can come round and pick you up about eleven, if you like to go with me. Don't keep me waiting a minute, however, there's a good girl."

"Thank you, papa," I replied; "but I have been thinking that my going to Woodleigh this morning would be rather a mistake. If Mrs. Graham could not or would not see me I should be only in the

way again, and Dr. Marsden might consider it necessary to walk home with me a second time. If you find that I can be of any use, I will go later, and engage a fly at Lidmere to fetch me home. I don't choose to be under obligations to that young man."

"Obligations, Conny," laughed my dear simple father, gulping down his breakfast in his usual boa-constrictor fashion, "why, what on earth has the idle fellow to do, and what can he like better than giving his arm to a nice companionable girl who has no brother to look after her? However, please yourself about going with me this morning. It is very possible that poor woman might refuse to see you."

Just as he was finishing his substantial meal, and I was swallowing my fourth cup of coffee to try to make up for a miserably wakeful night, he said abruptly"I suppose I must ask Marsden to dinner in a friendly way, Conny—I will attempt no dinner-parties yet. You won't mind dining with us, and presiding as mistress of the house, will you? I hate bachelor feasts, especially when I have to entertain a young man."

"I will do as you like, of course, papa," I answered; "but I hope we shall not be obliged to get on very familiar terms with this idol of the public. I told you last night how clever and agreeable I was compelled to acknowledge him, but I don't want to become one of his infatuated admirers. I meant, you know, to hate him cordially," I added, as my father shot one of his droll looks at me across the table, "and I am disgusted with myself that I cannot do so."

"Poor girl! it is a real misfortune!" said my father, in a tone of pretended condolence; "but you must try to bear it

philosophically. After all, Conny," he added, "there must be something monstrously kind and good-natured in this young fellow, to have induced him to come such a distance just to gratify a sick child."

"A dying child," I amended, "and one whose parents think all the world of him, and whom he cannot but value very highly. Still I don't want to deny him some credit in the matter. I should think he was a person to whom small kindnesses and courtesies, involving no entraordinary self-sacrifice, would always come easy. And I have invariably observed, papa," I added complacently, vainglorious of my own discrimination, "that the world appreciates imfinitely more a character like this than one with less outward graciousness and good nature, and far more real unselfishness and magnanimity."

"For the obvious reason," said my father, "that the daily exercise of small virtues must make more impression than the occasional display of large ones. Still I agree with you, my dear, that an unamiable rough exterior often hides a nobler nature than exists in many who pass muster in the world for saints and angels. Now good-bye for an hour or two, Conny. I will let you know how your poor friend is, as I pass our house after my visit."

I did not feel in the least inclined for work of any sort, after my father had left me. I was still tired, and a little feverish, from yesterday's excitements, and my cough was by no means gone yet. So, when I had held a short confab with cook, and made a hurried survey of my neglected account-books, I had a little couch drawn to the fire, and indulged in the most unusual luxury, to me, of resting—I believe

even dosing at intervals—with a volume of Mrs. Browning's poems, including "Little Mattie," in my hands.

It could not have been more than eleven o'clock, when I was startled from a particularly pleasant semi-unconscious state, which idleness and the warmth of the fire had induced, by a ring, almost loud enough to wake the dead, of the front-door bell. I knew it was the visitor's bell, and jumping up in a flutter of irritation, I was opening my own door, to say, "Show whoever it is into the drawing-room," when I nearly fell into the arms of Dr. Marsden, whom my stupid housemaid was officiously ushering in to me.

"Good morning," he said, in his very musical voice, and with something provokingly débonnaire in his manner, as he glanced at my ruffled head, and, I suspected, unpresentable aspect generally. "I

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have to apologise for intruding on a lady so early, but I am on my way to Abbeygates, and I thought you would like news of our friend Mrs. Graham."

"Oh, pray come in!" I stammered, wishing him at the Antipodes, or myself ten fathoms deep under the earth. "Papa started for Woodleigh an hour ago; I wonder you did not meet him. I am afraid I have been half asleep over the fire, and that I have made myself an object of derision. Will you excuse my untidiness, or shall I go and renovate while I give you the morning paper?"

"Oh, I hate the morning paper!" he said, laughing softly, and, in a little authoritative way, leading me back to my couch; "and as for your appearance, Miss Newton, it needs neither renovation nor apology. I always think children and fair women look especially attractive when wakened

abruptly from sleep, with tumbled locks and a pretty rose-flush on their cheeks. Oh! don't imagine I am going in for stupid flattery," he added, seeing, I suppose, that the "rose-flush," or, more likely, the brick-dust red, was deepening on my cheeks—"I am really considering you wholly in an artistic point of view."

"I would prefer just now that you did not consider me at all," I said, with some bluntness, for no one cares to be stared at, artistically or otherwise, who is conscious of looking untidy and hideous. "But how is dear Mrs. Graham this morning? You came to tell me about her."

"Yes," he answered, suppressing a smile this time, "and I am pleased to report somewhat favourably of her bodily condition, at any rate. She slept during a few hours of the night, and took a little breakfast this morning, and though we believe she only, at present, seeks to gain enough strength to get up and go to the poor child's room, still we are glad and thankful that the strength should come to her anyhow. Colonel Graham is devoting himself, heart and soul, to the task of comforting his wife, forgetting for the time his own share in the sad bereavement. That is a splendid man, Miss Newton. I cannot tell you how I admire him."

"Yes, indeed," I assented warmly, "he is disinterestedness itself. But I am so glad Mrs. Graham is even a shade better. I hope she will see my father. Do you think she will?"

"I hope she will," he said, with evident sincerity. "I know the Colonel wishes her to do so, and will urge it all he can. I am vexed that I should have missed Dr. Newton a second time, but I came over some fields I was familiar with, avoiding

the high road entirely. I am a great lover of English fields and lanes, and never feel happier than when I am walking and dreaming quite alone in them."

"Even in Winter?" I asked, "when the trees and hedges are leafless, and the fields ploughed up and marshy, and the paths wet and sodden."

"Yes, even then," he said, "because I can picture what they will be a few months later, and because the utter stillness and solitude to which they are generally condemned in Winter is soothing and delightful to my spirit. But you, who are such a lover of the country too, Miss Newton, must understand something of all this."

"How do you know I am a lover of the country?" I inquired, in astonishment. "I am sure nothing was said on that subject during the walk of yesterday."

"No," he replied; "but I know it, never-Don't you remember how I excited your curiosity by some vague allusions I made to my interest in the study of a particular character? Well, Miss Newton, I will tell you now that the character I meant was your own. My good cousins at Abbeygates, who hold you very close to their warm, simple hearts, have, from your first coming to Lidmere, written so much about you that I could not fail to have caught a portion of their enthusiasm—always, you understand, in an abstract, unpresuming way—and to have tried, as I said last night, to fit together the disjointed pieces of the puzzle, with a view of making a perfect and harmonious whole. This, you see, has had the effect of lessening, to such an extent, the distance which, as strangers, would naturally have existed between us, that I fear I may have seemed wanting, during our brief intercourse, in that ceremonious reserve which is usual in our reserved country till people have known each other some considerable time. If it has been so, Miss Newton, you must forgive me, in consideration of my frank avowal. Do you?"

The Longfellow smile was too much for me—poor, weak fly, hovering close to the spider's web, that I was!—and I said, with all dignity and "stand off" armour laid aside—

"The offence is not sufficiently clear to me, Dr. Marsden, to justify the proffer of forgiveness. But I am surprised that the dear old ladies at Abbeygates should have found leisure or inclination to write about me, when they had Mildred to dilate upon. She is beyond all dispute a most original and puzzling creature."

"Oh," he replied, laughing, "I know, of

course, a good deal of that wild school-girl hoyden too, but I consider her still in embryo. She may develop into anything—good, bad, or indifferent. As yet her money is undoubtedly the most attractive part about her."

"Indeed it is not!" I exclaimed warmly, indignant that anybody should speak thus of poor Mildred. "She has many faults, but they are those of her southern nature, and of her bad training. She has a hundred excellent qualities, and one of the most affectionate hearts I ever met with."

"And, best of all, she has a true and faithful friend in you, Miss Newton," he said, gravely enough this time. "I am sorry I shall not see the young lady during my present visit to Lidmere. I can quite understand her being worth a little patient investigation."

The morning was fast wearing on, and though I cannot deny that I enjoyed the society of the man I had not succeeded in hating, still I began to wonder if he ever meant to go. I supposed he liked the luxury of an easy-chair and a warm fire, as compared with the chill outward atmosphere, and that he liked talking was a self-evident fact, which would have been patent to the most obtuse observation.

When he saw Mrs. Browning's book on my sofa, he took it up and began to read aloud favourite passages of his own, reading them to perfection, as such an enthusiast would be sure to do, and in that deep melodious voice which almost equalled the strains he drew forth whenever his fingers touched any instrument of music.

I was fast losing myself in drinking in the flowing numbers of the queen of poets, and in gaining, from his occasional comments, new ideas in connection with them, when my father's gig rattled up noisily to the door, and that dear, busy, practical man a little later put his head in at my door, and, before he took in that I was not alone, said—

"Conny, you need not go to Woodleigh to-day. Mrs. Graham would scarcely see me, but she is better than I expected to find her—eh, my dear, what a blind old mole I must be getting! I never discovered that you had a visitor."

"Dr. Marsden, papa," I hastened, with, I am sure, a crimson face, to say, as the younger doctor rose and went with frankly outstretched hand towards the elder. "He called on his way to Abbeygates to tell me how Mrs. Graham was, and——"

"And has been beguiled into staying a most unreasonable time," interrupted my guest, filling up the pause I stupidly made,

"by the charms of your daughter's society, Dr. Newton. Well, I am delighted to shake hands with my successor at last," he added, in his gracious, pleasant way; "I began to think there was a fatality against our meeting, but better late than never."

"Quite so," said my dear old father, who looked such a big uncouth giant by the side of this slight, graceful young man; "but my time is too precious for drawing-room civilities. I can give you a lift in my gig as far as Abbeygates, if you like, and I shall be glad if you can come in and have a quiet dinner with me and Constance at six to-morrow evening. Are you ready to start now?"

"Oh, quite ready," said Dr. Marsden, in a tone that amused me by its suggestiveness of extreme *un*readiness. And then he gave one glance at the cheerful fire,

another at Mrs. Browning, and a third at me, and with the slightest of all shrugs of his shoulders murmured good-bye, and followed my blunt father out of the room.

CHAPTER VI.

A BIT OF FOOLISHNESS.

I WORKED hard all the remainder of that day, not because I was in a working mood, but because I was not quite at peace with myself; I had a vague undefined weight, scarcely strong enough for remorse, but strong enough to trouble me a good deal, upon my conscience, and extending thence to my spirits. I was almost inclined to think that I had been making a fool of myself, in listening for half a long morning, with complacency and pleasure, to "the voice of the charmer" in

the shape of an idle young man who, having given up his work in life, might possibly feel himself justified in reading sentimental poetry and talking romance by the hour together, in a lady's drawingroom. But it was abundantly clear to me that I had no sort of right to be that lady. I had not been brought up to snatch greedily at any of life's tempting fruits, or to expect that the milk and honey, flowing in its greenest valleys, was for my hands to gather and eat. It seemed nearly as strange to me, while I was drudging about my domestic matters in the latter part of that day, to remember how I had spent the morning, as it must have seemed to Cinderella, on her return to her rags and menial duties, to recall the hours wherein she had figured as a fair and lovely lady in the royal palace, and been distinguished by the notice of the prince.

I was glad when my father came home in the evening, that I might talk a little to him—you have been told that I never talked much to the poor weary man—and so get away from myself.

He did not happen to mention Dr. Marsden for some after he was in. He naturally thought I should be anxious to hear all he could tell me about Mrs. Graham and Woodleigh, and he grew even more eloquent than my guest of the morning had been in descanting on the virtues of the husband and father, who had come out in this crisis so grandly, and with such flying colours, that his friends could only look on and admire and wonder.

At last my father, in a pause between his meat and cheese, said abruptly,

"I have given you no time yet, Conny, to appeal to my paternal sympathy àpropos of the visitor I found with you this morn-

ing. I knew I was earning your cordial gratitude by taking him away at once. Had he been boring you a great deal?"

"Oh, not so very much at the time," I answered, an instinct of sincerity urging me to this qualified admission, "but I have been dissatisfied with myself ever since. I am so unaccustomed, you know, to wasting a single minute in the early part of the day."

"But you could not help his staying, my dear," said that precious man opposite to me, with a view of consoling. "You are not sufficiently intimate with him yet to have justified your telling him he was a hindrance and a nuisance at that hour of the day. I dropped him at Abbeygates, which gave us little time for conversation; but he struck me as a pleasant young fellow, and certainly good-looking enough,

Conny, to turn a considerable number of weak women's heads."

"Yes," I assented, with a mental note to the effect that I would pluck out my right eye rather than that he should turn mine, "we knew beforehand that he must be handsome from his striking likeness to Longfellow. What do you wish ordered for dinner to-morrow, papa?"

My father looked up and laughed aloud.

"My dear, what a question! As if I cared. Why, Conny, you are a perfect housekeeper, and might be trusted to order dinner for half a hundred people. I don't suppose this young ex-doctor is a special epicure."

"But I meant," I said, a little unreasonably vexed at being laughed at, "to ask whether you intended entertaining him as you would an absolute stranger, or as one whom you have had professional business

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with, and with whose friends and relatives you are already on intimate terms."

"Oh, the last, Conny, the last, of course," was the quick reply. "No ceremony whatever is needed. Give us a joint and a currant dumpling, and I will see that he has a good bottle of wine. Don't put yourself out of the way, my dear, the least bit in the world."

I had no predetermined intention of doing so—for indeed why should I? Dr. Marsden was not going to be my guest. Nevertheless, when the next morning came, and my intelligent cook presented herself, in the neatest of white aprons, for orders, I discovered that I was in a most wavering and undecided frame of mind, and instead of at once giving the good woman a simple bill of fare and dismissing her, I fixed my eyes dreamily upon that

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spotless apron, and waited for counsel or inspiration.

My dear unsophisticated father had certainly cut the matter short, or had meant so to do, by suggesting a joint and a current dumpling; but this was too ridiculous. There must be either soup or fish to begin with, and there must also be an entrée or two, if only to show Dr. Marsden that I knew what dining in civilized society was, and then, for sweets, there must be, at any rate, a little variety, and a little elegance, not including the currant dumpling which had floated insinuatingly before the mental vision of the giver of the feast.

"I wish you would help me, Philips," I said at last, gaining no hints from the white apron, and fancying my subordinate was staring at me more than usual; "I

am very stupid this morning, and I can think of nothing beyond a cod's head and shoulders with oyster sauce."

"And a very pretty dish too, miss," replied Philips with enthusiasm—"when it's to be had, leastways, which in this poky little town one can never answer for. And after that, miss, or any other fish we may have the luck to meet with, what would you choose to have?"

"Oh, dear!" I exclaimed, once more tempted to wish Dr. Marsden at Jericho, "I really don't know. What do you think of a couple of boiled fowls with a tongue for one end of the table, and a roast haunch of mutton at the other?"

Philips pursed up her lips, and assumed a most deferential air.

"Certainly, miss, if you please, only I understood from master that it was to be quite a plain dinner. I shall be happy to

do my best in cooking whatever you like to order."

I did not admire her manner exactly, and I replied a little sharply—

"That is understood, and I was not aware that I was ordering anything but a plain dinner. I shall decide, then, upon the fowls and the mutton, and for sweets you can get a jelly and some little knick-knacks from the confectioner's, to save labour for yourself. This will leave you time to make a few rissoles, and perhaps a dish of sweetbreads as entrées; I want nothing beyond, Philips, and you can start for your marketing as soon as you are ready."

Philips made a deep curtsey—it was the first time she had ever done so in my service—and retired; and I, still irritated at not having been met half-way in my laudable efforts to justify my father's praises of

my housekeeping, sat down to a basket full of needlework in a kind of defiant mood, the defiance extending, and indeed chiefly addressed, to some second voice within me which would go on charging me with undue fussiness and anxiety about the dinner at which I was to preside in the evening, and the details of which were not even yet arranged to my satisfaction.

I wanted, above everything, some flowers for the centre of the table. I was certain Dr. Marsden would appreciate flowers more than all the delicacies in the shape of food I could provide for him. But our garden was absolutely bare, except for some half-blown laurustinas and a pale primrose or two, with the whole of which floral specimens I could not have filled a wine-glass. There was, I knew, a very good nurseryman in Lidmere, and Philips would have to pass it in her marketing; but I was

too great a coward (after my recent scene with this provoking woman) to ask her to order a hothouse bouquet for me. She might think half a dozen curtseys, and going from my presence backwards, not too much to express her sense of my magnificence. Anyhow, I dared not risk it; and yet I craved those flowers—sweet-scented, elegant, and suggestive as they would be—with a most foolish and childish craving.

This grew, as all weaknesses that are not resisted have a habit of growing, while I sat alone over my monotonous sewing, and at about twelve o'clock, easily persuading myself that I wanted a turn in the fresh air, I put on my bonnet and went out in the direction of the florist's. I only meant just to see what flowers he had, and to ascertain their price. I would not commit an extravagance for the world, and

there was a vague fear, too, that my father, though not much given to observation, might detect so unusual an addition to his dinner-table as an epergne of the choicest flowers, and laugh at me.

In the meanwhile, I examined, with ever-deepening admiration, some freshly cut bouquets of geraniums, mignonette, and lovely white primulas, the whole surrounded by maiden-hair fern, and my prudence melted like wax before such tempting objects. With a hurried "I will take this, please," and a sigh that must have been from that second self within me, I drew forth my purse and laid down five shillings on the counter. The man thanked me, put a second sheltering paper round my fragile purchase, and bowed me out of his shop.

I walked home very quickly, and in dread of meeting anybody I knew. Of

I should do so, as the worst that could be said of me would be comprised in the old pithy sentence, "A fool and his money are soon parted;" but for all this, I was unfeignedly glad when I shut my own front door upon myself and my beauteous burden, and had leisure to smell at it and devour it to my heart's content.

When I had arranged it in a very handsome epergne we had brought with us from London, but had never used in my memory, I was delighted with the effect, and, keeping it for the present in the room I was occupying, I looked at it from time to time, and always repeated in doing so—

"Why, five shillings was really fabulously cheap."

And yet in my whole life before I had never spent one shilling on flowers—a sixpenny nosegay from Covent Garden having been esteemed in our London days a luxury we ought only to indulge in once a week.

My good, slaving father was however making money pretty rapidly now, and he allowed me so liberal a sum for house-keeping that I generally had a tolerable fund in reserve. I had bought the flowers out of this, and, as I have said, I chose to think that they were fabulously cheap.

After all I have recorded of my painstaking concerning the dinner, and my craze about expensive flowers to give it a graceful finish, my readers may expect to be told that I made an elaborate toilette to match the rest of my preparations. But I am happy to say I was not guilty of such bad taste and vulgarity as this. I put on a perfectly plain black silk, and did not add a single ornament. One scarlet geranium I abstracted from my bouquet, and fastened with a leaf or two into my waist-band, which relieved the extreme sternness of my costume and looked fresh and nice.

Then I went down and superintended the laying of the table in our small but pretty dining-room, and, carrying in the epergne myself at last, was startled for the moment by the really elegant effect of the whole.

I wished now very much that my father would come in first, that I might exhibit my handiwork to him in private, and that he might recover from any little surprise it would probably cause him. It was not at all unlikely that, if he only first saw my table when he entered the dining-room with his guest and myself, he might exclaim, in his blunt, blundering fashion, "Why, Conny, what on earth have you been about? Did you think I was going

to receive the Lord Mayor and the Lady Mayoress?" or something that would be equally outrageous and equally embarrassing to poor me.

As it happened, Dr. Marsden arrived first, and I had to betake myself to the drawing-room to receive him, and to leave the dining-room to its fate.

After telling me that Mrs. Graham was about the same as yesterday, he apologised for being rather early, but said he had been at Abbeygates for the greater part of the afternoon, and had calculated on the distance between his cousins' house and ours being longer than it really was.

"And then, too," he added, with the smile that was unlike any other smile I ever saw (I could not help seeing and feeling this), "your excellent father snapped me up yesterday morning and whirled me off in such a sudden and peremptory

manner that I felt defrauded of a part of my visit to his daughter. I am no philosopher, Miss Newton, and I did consider it hard lines to be torn from a delicious fire, and from Mrs. Browning, and—from you."

There was a marked and significant pause before the last two words which brought the red to my face, and made me vexed with the speaker of them for a moment. He saw this, with the quick intuition which enabled him, more than most men, to detect instantly when he had committed a mistake.

"It was no wonder," he went on to say, because I have the reputation, and I believe I deserve it, of being an inveterate talker, and you, Miss Newton, had proved yourself a most admirable and patient listener. I am sure I must have tired you dreadfully. Your white cheeks and drooping eyelids haunted me all the day after."

"A most needless persecution on their part," I said, laughing, "for I went to work when you left with papa, and never ceased till evening. I had been unusually idle before you came, and my hurt conscience had to be appeased."

"Ah! you are a great lover of work, I know," he observed, in a tone of interest that could not but flatter from its apparent warmth and sincerity. "I wish I was; but from my boyhood I have always shrunk from trouble and exertion, excusing myself on the plea of physical inefficiency. I am beginning, however, to think that it is just laziness, and a tendency to dream away the working hours of a life that was given me to work in. I must ask you for the secret of finding pleasure in labour for mere labour's sake."

"Begin to labour," I replied, "and the secret will soon be your own. Can you

not, now your health is improved, resume your profession in a new neighbourhood? Doctors, of all people, have such a field of usefulness open to them. If I had been a man, I should have loved to be a doctor."

"Should you indeed!" he said, with a little expressive shrug. "It is not pleasant work, however, I assure you, Miss Newton. I fairly hated it except for the friends it procured me. No, I could not be a doctor again. I should not so much mind taking up music as a profession if it were more gentlemanly. By-the-by"—looking all round the room—"where is your piano? You play and sing, of course?"

"I have no piano," I said, "and I neither play nor sing. A terrible confession, is it not?"

"A most unusual one, at any rate," he answered, and, I was positive, in a voice of

regret and disappointment. "But do you not care, then, for music?"

"Very much for some kinds of music," I told him, my thoughts reverting to those delicious strains I had listened to on the morning of Evelyn Graham's death. "I love the organ always, and I am fond of singing. Mildred Earnshaw is a very accomplished musician."

"So my cousins have informed me, but they never said you did not play. It is a great pity."

I was going to remark that I had never hitherto deplored it, in the engrossing though humbler occupations of my busy life, when the sound of my father's voice in the hall scattered every other thought, except the one of my elegant dinner-table and its possible effect upon the dear man who was giving the dinner.

He had just time, after a hurried toilet,

to come in and greet his guest, when the already delayed meal was announced. Dr. Marsden gave me his arm; I struggled to compose my features into a dignified quietness in case of the worst, and, followed closely by my father, who said he was tired and hungry, walked, with my unconscious escort, tremblingly into the dining-room.

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CHAPTER VII.

MY FATHER ENTERTAINS A DINNER GUEST.

Having indicated to Dr. Marsden his seat, and taken my own, I ventured a timid glance towards the head of the table, and found that my father was just preparing to say grace—a duty he never omitted. This was a relief to me. He had evidently been able to command his feelings thus far, and perhaps good taste and pity for me would influence him in refraining from open observation on what his eyes beheld till he had me alone with him again.

When, however, the silver dish cover was removed, and a really magnificent cod's head and shoulders exposed to view (I am sure Philips had taken a delight in exceeding my orders), he turned and gave me, while brandishing the fish slice, one expressive look, and I knew that he had taken in every detail of my costly and foolish display—I began to think it foolish now—and would indemnify himself for his present forbearance towards me by unlimited teasing and quizzing by-and-by.

Still I was spared for the moment, and altogether as regarded our guest, and this was something to be thankful for. He, of course, saw nothing out of the way in the dinner set before him, and was no more favourably impressed by it than he would probably have been unfavourably impressed had I condemned him to the

plain joint and the current dumpling. admired my flowers, and asked me innocently what apparatus I employed for heating my conservatory. When I said, with cheeks that must have rivalled my own bit of scarlet geranium, that I had no conservatory, and that they were bought flowers, my father nearly choked-he was eating cod at the same time—in his efforts not to laugh aloud. But after this I had no further trials in reference to the dinner. Everything was well cooked, and seemed to be appreciated by both gentlemen, and the wine was the very best our cellar could produce, and amongst the little reserve stock kept by my father, who drank none himself, for special occasions. He made a show of pouring a little in his glass when he was entertaining a wine-drinker, but there was no reality in it, and I had to take rather more than I wanted myself that Dr. Marsden might not think he was emptying the decanters.

When the fish was removed, and the first edge of my dear father's appetite removed with it, he became talkative and communicative, our guest having up to that time been doing a considerable deal of small dinner talk with me alone—out of respect, no doubt, for his tired host's exhaustion and hunger.

But now my father told us that he had come last from Woodleigh, that Mrs. Graham was still exciting her husband's keenest anxiety by her stony indifference to everything, and her refusal to leave for a minute during the day the room that held the little flower-enshrouded coffin. She had what small amount of food they could prevail on her to take carried to her there, but would speak to no one except her husband, and only in monosyllables to him.

"There has been," added my father, "that good creature, Miss Brown, hovering patiently about the house all day, in hopes of being admitted to speak a word of comfort to the poor desolate woman, but she won't have her near her, even to look at Evelyn, and one would think, judging from present appearances, that the gentlest and most docile creature in the world had grown suddenly, under her calamity, into one of the coldest and hardest. The Colonel took me in, without warning, to where she sat alone in her unfathomable sorrow; but she only gave me her hand in an utterly dull, listless way, and for all answers to my inquiries said that nothing ailed her, and that she wanted no doctoring."

"I always foresaw this if she lost Evelyn," said Dr. Marsden feelingly; "Mrs. Graham is one of those women, and they

are not rare, who love their children with a passion woven into their very being. She is a godly woman, I am certain, and yet she resents having this last and fairest taken from her."

"And it is surely natural, even if lacking in pious submission," asserted my large-hearted and sympathizing father. "She will not be condemned for it by the Friend above, who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. But I do wish," he added, reverting to his professional interest in the matter, "that we could get her to shed a whole bucketful of tears. Hang it! women are usually ready enough to weep on the slightest provocation;—over the death of a pet kitten; but this poor soul, who has lost more than the value of a world, cannot cry at all. I don't in the least see what we are to do with her."

"After the funeral she should, if possi-

ble, be got out of the neighbourhood," suggested the younger doctor, speaking not, of course, professionally, but as a friend; "there is nothing like total change in these cases—"

"Nothing," agreed my father. "The Colonel and myself have talked it over to-day—and, by-the-by, Conny," turning to me, "he asked if I thought you could be bribed or coaxed to go away with them if they do go. It would be to the seaside, and you have never seen the blue ocean in all your life. Picture that, Dr. Marsden, in this age of locomotion! My little town-bred girl here has actually never seen a wave."

"I envy her beyond expression, then, her first view of one," he said, quite enthusiastically. "It will be a glorious revelation of the beautiful to one who will look upon it both with the artistic eye and

the poetic imagination. What do you say about accepting the invitation, Miss Newton?"

"Ah, what do you say, Conny?" repeated my father, as a great rush of thoughts and suggestions went through my brain. "I could easily spare you for such a treat, even if it were for a month, or longer. You would like to go?"

"We will talk it over when I have had time to reflect, papa," I said, not caring that our guest should hear all the pros and cons in the matter that had rapidly occurred to me. "I believe I should like it immensely, if you would not miss me at home."

"I did not say I should not miss you, puss," he answered, affectionately, and fearing I had been hurt, "only that I could spare you for your own enjoyment, and the comfort of our friends. Anyhow,

I promised Colonel Graham that you should go up to Woodleigh to-morrow with the chance of the wife seeing you. Nurse thinks she will."

"I will go, of course," I said; and handing something to Dr. Marsden as I spoke I could not help noticing that he looked pleased, though he forbore joining any more in our dialogue, which terminated then, and was succeeded by a general and lively conversation during the remainder of our meal.

I left the gentlemen together early, and saw nothing further of them till, at about ten o'clock, Dr. Marsden, who had been smoking and chatting with his host in the library, came alone into the drawing-room to wish me good night. I was reading by the light of a shaded lamp, and in point of fact had been greatly enjoying my quiet evening, but he looked at me with a very

friendly pity in his earnest, searching eyes, and said how lonely I seemed—was not my whole life rather lonely?

I replied that it was necessarily so, but not in the least unhappy on this account.

"No," he said, "because you have such abundant resources in yourself, and dwell, I am pretty sure, in a world of your own creating; but I don't think it is quite good for you to be so solitary, Miss Newton"—as I was about to give a decided contradiction to this statement—"you are coming out to Woodleigh to-morrow. May I call and fetch you? I am sleeping at Abbeygates to-night."

For one moment I paused. I was not in doubt as to whether I should like the walk with Dr. Marsden for a companion, but I was in doubt as to whether I should be wise in accepting his offer. I was beginning to mistrust myself, and the sensa-

tion was humiliating and painful to me. But he waited for an answer, and presently I said, with all the graciousness I could assume, because of the apparent ungraciousness of the words I was about to speak-

"Thank you very much, but my time is so uncertain that I would rather go alone. I mean this, Dr. Marsden, therefore please don't fancy I want to be urged on the subject. Forgive my candour. who live much alone, you know, are apt to get questionable manners. Good night."

I held out my hand with a smile, and he took it without smiling at all.

"Good night, Miss Newton," were the only words he said; but his voice was suggestive of keener disappointment than I could possibly suppose the occasion justified.

I was sorry to have hurt him, but I had

gained one little triumph over myself, and there was consolation for the present and hope for the future in this.

Come what may, I would jealously guard my heart while the power to do so was still in my own hands. My good angel had shown me danger in the pathway I was treading, and whether this was small or great, I was resolutely determined to retrace my steps.

CHAPTER VIII.

VERY WISE RESOLVES.

MY father, who had been waiting in the hall to speed the parting guest with one of his choicest cigars, came into the drawing-room as soon as the latter was fairly off, and walked up to where I was still sitting with my book in my hand.

"Poor little woman!" he said, stooping to kiss me, and this he rarely did except at morning and night, "you must have had a dull evening. We ought to have invited at least one lady to keep you company. I wish I had thought of asking Miss Brown."

"I have been quite happy, you dear old man," I replied, with a sudden keen sense of his extreme goodness to me. "I should not have cared to have Miss Brown."

"No?—then we might have coaxed the sisters from Abbeygates to have joined our party. Such a first-rate and elegant dinner, Conny, ought not to have been thrown away upon one young man. It was really perfection, my dear."

He was not laughing at me yet, at any rate, and I said humbly—

"I hope you did not think it overdone, papa. Of course the fish was three times as much as I meant to have; but that was either cook's fault or the fishmonger's. For the rest, I was perhaps a little unduly anxious that your rival in this place should have a favourable impression of your hospitality and style of living. The flowers were certainly an extravagance;

but if you think it a very absurd one, I will pay for them out of my own pocket. I know you were nearly choking with laughter when our visitor asked me about my conservatory; but you must acknowledge that they gave a finish and a tone to the table."

"My dear child, I was delighted with the whole affair, aud, as you may have observed, ate like a wolf of all your good things myself. The conservatory question did amuse me, because you looked so unnecessarily shame-faced about it; but so far from letting you pay for the flowers, you silly child, I am going to give you a couple of sovereigns extra to help you out with the dinner. This is only fair, since the guest was of my inviting, and you had not even the advantage of his society during the evening."

"I did not want it, papa," I said quick-

ly, as he drew a chair beside me, and seemed in an unusually chatty mood, "nor do I want the extra money. You know I never spend my full housekeeping allowance, and I have abundance in hand at present for flowers and all."

"Never mind, my dear, that is your affair. You shall have the two sovereigns, in any case, and you can buy yourself a new bonnet with them, if you like. You will want some freshening up if you go with the Grahams to the seaside. I hope you will decide on accepting their invitation."

"I have decided, papa, dear," I said; "I mean to go if they really wish it. I think it will be very nice."

"That is right," he answered kindly; "I should have been so vexed had you missed such a chance. But now, Conny, don't you wish to hear my opinion of the

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gentleman you call my rival? We have had ample opportunity at last of finding out each other's strong and weak points, and you are usually interested in new and original characters."

"Do you consider Dr. Marsden's an original character?" I asked, as I exchanged my book for some needlework, and prepared to be instructed if I was not amused.

"In some respects I do," said my father. "He has read and thought more than most men of his age, and he can talk without pedantry or conceit. I quite agree with you, my dear, as to his unusually pleasant companionship. What he seems to lack is energy—enough to make a complete man of him-not intellectually, for his intellect and imagination constitute his great charm, but morally and physically. An odd idea struck me, as we

talked together over our cigars, and that was what two first-rate characters could be made by mixing that of young Radcliff with that of Dr. Marsden. They form a most curious contrast, if you come to compare them—the first wanting a few more brains and having strength and energy and manliness to spare in any/quantity, and the last deficient in all these, and having brains enough for half a dozen. Give me credit for my funny notion, Conny, and tell me which of the two men, as representative characters, you prefer."

I did not think it necessary to admit that I had been comparing them in my secret thoughts all the evening, and not for the first time since I had known Dr. Marsden, either—but I said lightly,

"It is a most difficult question to answer, papa, especially as I know, at present, considerably less of one than of

theother. If I spoke on superficial grounds, I should say Gilbert Radcliff is the simpler and the worthier nature, and Dr. Marsden the most fascinating. This last may be very worthy, too, but I think nearly everybody, certainly nearly every woman, would discover his fascinations first."

I thought I was doing a little for myself in speaking out thus candidly and boldly. When we see a lion in our path there is no wisdom in trying to persuade ourselves, or others, that we take it for a harmless lamb.

"Bravo! Conny," exclaimed my father, laughing, and patting me on the shoulder, "you have hit the question nicely, I think, and had the courage to give a man you were prejudiced against, his due. Yes, I fancy, if the two were weighed in a scale to determine their actual moral worth, our old friend Gilbert—your old

friend, I should rather say—would prove the heavier cargo, as he undoubtedly would were bones and sinews in question."

I pondered over this opinion, and over all my father had said of Heber Marsden, as I lay awake that night. Apart from what I had observed in my, as yet, limited intercourse with him, I had a very strong intuition that his nature would not in the long run harmonize with mine. I might -nay, I did-intensely admire his intellect and his poet face: I might be drawn nearer and nearer to him by the consciousness of his strange and rapidly developed interest in me; I might as this grew—did I weakly suffer it to grow—come to love him, and to cleave to him as a woman loves and cleaves to the one man for whom she is content to lose the world; but I knew, by the help of an inner sight, that there would be a something lacking when

all was done, that Heber Marsden was not the man to whom I should be justified in committing my happiness for life. If my reader is inclined to imagine that such thoughts were altogether premature and vain, I can only say that they were not of spontaneous growth, but forced into existence by many looks and words, over and above those I have recorded, and which compelled the conviction that Heber Marsden was either the most accomplished and subtle male flirt that ever trifled with women's hearts, or that he had, however unexplainably, conceived a liking for me or the picture he had drawn of me before we met—that would probably, if we were much together, ripen into a strong attachment. There was a romance and a strangeness about the whole affair, including my resolve to hate him and my immediate breaking of this resolve when I first saw

him, and heard his wondrous music, that had a dangerous charm for me.

I was not blind to the actual state of things even now, and then his undisguised seeking of my society, his manifest interest in me and my life, his peculiar softness and tenderness of manner—all were helping or had helped to give this man a place in my thoughts which I did not mean him to occupy, from which, as I assured myself that wakeful night, I could thrust him easily now, if I only went the right way about it.

I did not need in this wise determination to add to other reasons against encouraging his dawning liking for me, that of my old belief concerning the dear spinsters' wish to bring their cousin and niece together. This might have influenced me a little had it stood alone; but, as it was, I was armed with weightier arguments, and

I rarely, in those early days, remembered my first strong impression on the subject.

Waking the next morning, I remembered instantly that I had to go to Woodleigh some time in the day, that I should probably see Dr. Marsden and be brought more or less under the influence of the temptation I was resolutely bent on resisting. He might, it was true, be away while I was there. His numerous friends and admirers in Lidmere would be craving a visit from their former adored doctor, who was certainly not indifferent to popularity, or he might be at the church, practising on the unrivalled organ which, Mrs. Graham had once told me, was his chief attraction to Lidmere. If I did not positively wish I might miss seeing him to-day, it was only because I was going to Woodleigh with the express object of accepting

an invitation that would remove me for awhile out of harm's way altogether.

If the silly moth has no candle in sight, it can scarcely burn its wings in the flame of it.

CHAPTER IX.

COLONEL GRAHAM PRAISES HIS FRIEND.

As it turned out a fine bright day, I did not leave home till after an early dinner, which consisted, and would consist for a week at least, of a réchauffé of that famous cod's head and shoulders. It would not give a single dish of it to my father, lest he should be reminded of the foolish extravagance he had so kindly condoned, and begin to indulge in the quizzing he had hitherto abstained from. I don't know why it was, but I had quite a peculiar shrinking from being quizzed

on the subject of Dr. Marsden, and I was always fearing, from my secret consciousness, I suppose, that my dear old father, who loved his joke, would discover something to tempt him to make a dead set at me.

Colonel Graham was looking out for me when I arrived, about three o'clock, at Woodleigh. He reproached me for not having come to dinner, said his wife would see me for a few minutes by-and-by, and then began at once to speak about the seaside trip he hoped to accomplish shortly. I told him I should be only too happy to go with them, and he thanked me warmly, adding that nothing of their plan had been even broached to Mrs. Graham yet, nor would be till after the funeral, which would take place in two days' time.

Then he made me sit down and have a

glass of wine, while he gave me some details concerning his poor wife's state, speaking, however, hopefully as to the future, if she could be prevailed on to leave the neighbourhood and all its sad associations for awhile.

Finally, he introduced the subject of Dr. Marsden, asking me how I liked him (of course my answer was as guarded as sincerity would allow), and telling me that after the funeral he was going to stay at Abbeygates with his cousins.

"He is making calls in the town now," the Colonel added; "but I expect him back to tea. He plays the organ a good deal when he is here for my poor Mary's comfort and soothing, though she never leaves the room, you know, and only catches the sounds as they float up to her. We are sure she likes it, because once she said to nurse, when the old woman took her dinner

in—'Do you believe my angel is singing atthis moment to such strains as those? I think she is, and every now and then her precious voice seems to me, as I listen intently, to mingle with them. Dr. Marsden does not play naturally. He is inspired!'

I said I did not wonder at her thinking so—that his playing was quite magical, and must, to real connoisseurs of music, be almost divine. His being here just now was a most fortunate circumstance.

"Yes," said the genial Colonel. "I assure you I feel it to be so. Oh! he is a good, kind fellow, Miss Newton, and did a loving deed in coming over from Norway to please a little child, who was too far gone even to thank him when he got here. I fancy, if Marsden were plainer and rougher in his exterior, he would get more credit for being manly and worthy

of respect. His very handsome and refineed countenance actually tells against him with some people."

I thought the Colonel meant that it told against him with me, and true to my resolve of never blinking facts in discussing Heber Marsden with others, I replied frankly,

"It ought not to do so. His face, though refined to a singular degree, does not indicate weakness of character. I should infer from it that he has a strong will and strong feelings; and, loving ease (he acknowledges to this), is perhaps too inclined to give the reins to both."

"You are quite a female Lavater, Miss Newton," smiled the Colonel, "and have, I fancy, judged our friend correctly. He is somewhat of an epicure in all things, loves ease, as you say, and pleasant surroundings, and material comforts, even

luxuries to some extent, not of course including the grosser kind, for his poet temperament saves him from that. would never have done for a soldier, or for a camp life. The practical part of his own profession wearied and often revolted him, and yet there is plenty of good stuff in Heber Marsden, too, only his heart, being soft and tender as a woman's, and his imagination dominant over his whole mental organisation, he doesn't, in common everyday life, show to the advantage that he ought to do. Don't you know, Miss Newton, that there are a few people born into our plain, prosaic world who give one always the impression of having strayed into it by accident, who were intended for some more ethereal and idealistic planet? Well, Heber Marsden is just one of these exceptional individuals, and he ought to find, as his companion through life, a

sympathetic spirit, but who would unite with her sympathising and appreciative powers the measure of activity and energy in common things which he does not possess. If there is such a woman "—here the Colonel gave unequivocal tokens of trying to hide that he had any personal or particular meaning, but failed signally—"I can only say I hope, with all my heart, their paths will meet and become one."

With a deadly fear that my face was betraying my apprehension of his well-meant but clumsy allusion, I was about to flounder as clumsily into some remark about Mildred Earnshaw, when the hall bell rang, and with a sudden and pleased exclamation of "By Jove! there he is," Colonel Graham sprang up and went to meet his dear friend and guest in the lobby.

I naturally concluded that the two gentlemen would come into the room where I was, together, and I had determined to make their appearance a signal for asking leave to go up to Mrs. Graham. But in a minute or two the Colonel returned to me alone.

"Marsden is tired," he said, "and, like all geniuses, proposes resting himself by grinding away at his art. In other words, he is going to his beloved organ in the library for half an hour. Will you stay here and rest yourself, or may I ascertain if Mary can see you now?"

I said I should be glad to go upstairs at once, if I might, because the evenings were short, and I should have to leave immediately after tea.

"Leave after tea!" exclaimed the master of the house, "why, what nonsense on such a mild Spring day, and when both Marsden and myself meant to enjoy the walk home with you by moonlight. You vol. II.

will change your mind, dear Miss Newton, and stay with us as long as you can."

"I cannot stay longer than I have said,"
I replied, struck by the fact that Dr.
Marsden had not intended offering to be
my sole escort again, "because I have
engaged a fly from Lidmere to fetch me
at six o'clock. Indeed, Colonel Graham"
—as he was about to protest and expostulate—"my cough is still troublesome, and
I don't want to swell my poor father's list
of patients any longer, and you will, you
know, have quite enough of me by-and-by."

"Fiddlesticks!" he said bluntly, "we have been shabbily done out of our walk—Marsden and I—and as for having enough of you by-and-by, tell that fib when we complain, Miss Newton. But come up to Mary now, as time is running on, and if a conveyance is ordered, why, I suppose you must go home in it."

The organ was pealing forth its most delicious strains when I was ushered into the half-darkened room where a pale mother sat by the still uncovered coffin of her dead child.

I went up and kissed her, she somewhat listlessly returning my caress, and then stood looking at the still lovely marble image of the lost Evelyn.

"This is my last day," said Mrs. Graham, only for one moment removing her hungry eyes from the coffin. "To-morrow at daybreak they will shut my angel away from me for ever. I have lived through so much that I suppose I shall live through this" (her tone was bitter as well as unutterably pathetic); "but I wish God would have pity on me, and take me to Evelyn and all my other lost darlings. Life is hard to many, I know; but it is

hardest of all to a mother who is bereft and desolate."

I sat down and tried to speak a few loving words—not comforting words—God alone could comfort such woe as hers—but just words expressive of affection and heart-felt sympathy, which, in another way, that divine music was expressing below.

"You are all very good to me, very patient," she responded at length, "and I shall be able to feel grateful by-and-by. At present my heart is nothing but a stone, and I have no feeling beyond that of my own crushing misery. My poor, long-enduring husband made me promise to see you to-day, and I have done so; but you must forgive me if I am churlish and cold. I am really nearest being comforted when I am alone with her, and with that music, which takes me up to the

bright Heaven which has claimed her."

After this, I had no excuse for staying with the stricken woman, and I went down to tell Colonel Graham of how little use I could be as yet, and to offer to preside at the tea-tray which had appeared, with its usual rigid punctuality, as the clock struck six.

"Ah, do," he said eagerly, "for I miss poor Mary more at this hour than at any other, not to speak of my little brighteyed Birdie, whom I miss grievously and constantly too; but the greater sorrow swallows up the less, and my dear wife's state lies heaviest of all on my heart and spirits just now. Our Evelyn is beyond the region of pain and sadness, but her mother may have years of mourning to go through before her rest comes."

"But be sure strength will be given her," I said; and then I said no more, as

Dr. Marsden joined us, looking subdued and quiet, and greeting me with more reserve than he had yet manifested from the very beginning of our intercourse. course I was glad of it, but I wondered whether I had seriously offended him by declining to let him walk with me to Woodleigh, and then I wondered whether his sensitive organization included an irritable temper, and then I wondered how far I might safely go in my graciousness towards him to restore peace between us, and finally I handed him his tea, and asked him some questions about his relatives at Abbeygates, whom, I added, I had not seen for a length of time.

"You will find a note from one of them on your return home," he said, smiling just as much as, and no more, than I had smiled. "They complain of your

giving them so little of your society now your friend Mildred is absent, and they want you to see how the garden is getting on this mild, genial weather. They tell me you have quite a craze about their quaint old garden, Miss Newton."

"I think it perfection," I answered warmly-"a spot for a poet to dream away his life in. My father declared I had lost my head when he took me round it for the first time. I had not quite done this, but I had seen it, I believe, in a dream years before. One does, you know, often see places and people in dreams that we are to see in reality later."

"Or we fancy it, which comes to about the same thing," he replied, with the least touch of cynicism in his tone. "Quite half our life is made up of illusions of one kind or another, you know, Miss Newton, and happy are those who never discover

that they are being deceived. You have read 'Phantastes,' of course."

I confessed I had not; and then Colonel Graham said he would lend it to me; and then I busied myself with my duties at the tea-table, and allowed the two gentlemen to talk together. Dr. Marsden gave an account of the visits he had paid during the afternoon, and said, laughing and making a jest of his popularity, that he had been let in for so many engagements for dinners, teas, and luncheons, that if he stayed six months in Lidmere he could scarcely fulfil them all.

"By Jove! Marsden," commented his host, "I would not be in your shoes for the doubling of my half pay. It is all very well to be liked by one's friends, but you young, good-looking bachelors, who are supposed to have saved money, are in danger of being devoured by the public. I

wonder you take it as easily as you do."

"Oh! there is no great merit in accepting what is offered under the name of friendship," said the other, rejecting, as I considered he might well do, praise for not quarrelling with his sugar-plums. "I am not sure that I would forego popularity if I could. One may doubt the entire genuineness of all the smiles lavished upon one's self, but it is pleasant to be welcomed everywhere with a smile, nevertheless."

"So it must be," assented the Colonel, who was slow to admit a weakness in a man he liked as he liked Heber Marsden, "and neither Miss Newton nor I can be hard upon you for loving the love of men and women. Did you, by-the-by, go to the church to-day?"

"No, I had no time, but I shall play on Sunday. I long to have my hands on the dear old organ once more. I never feel really inspired unless I am improvising on that matchless instrument. I believe it will tempt me to settle down, a solitary hermit, in Lidmere at last!"

"I wish it might," said the Colonel heartily, "unless you get a stronger temptation to do so, first—but here, I declare, is Miss Newton's vexatious and impertinent vehicle. I can't forgive her for having ordered it, and I hope you will be equally resentful."

It was Dr. Marsden who led me out and handed me into my offending conveyance.

"If I fail in being resentful," he said, in a low, deferential tone, "I take it out, Miss Newton, in being sorry; but this of course is less than nothing to you who are perhaps anxious to teach me a lesson that even my popularity has a limit."

"Why should I presume to teach you a

lesson at all?" I replied, as lightly as I could speak, being weakly annoyed that I had annoyed him. "I am not a teacher of anything, Dr. Marsden, only a learner, and a very slow one. Pray forgive me if I have appeared ungracious again—and good night."

"Good night," he repeated earnestly, detaining my hand for one moment. And then the door was shut, and the whip applied to the tired horse, and a sadly perturbed and restless spirit whirled away into the gathering gloom of a purple, misty evening.

CHAPTER X.

MISS LAMB COMES OUT AS A LETTER-WRITER.

THE letter from Miss Lamb being a curiosity in its way, I give it verbatim, reminding my reader that the admirable and interesting spinsters of Abbeygates were educated at a period when it was as much a matter of course for lady letter-writers to underline, by way of emphasis, every second or third word of their compositions, as it was for them to be trained in the utter mistrust of everything and everybody not English. Here is the letter I found waiting for me on my arrival at home:—

"MY DEAR MISS NEWTON,

"We rejoice unfeignedly, my sister and myself, in learning from our cousin Heber that you are well enough to be out once more. You have had a tedious attack, and we know by experience how influenza depresses both mind and body of the sufferer from it, and makes a little change and cheerful society absolutely necessary when the patient is convalescent. Now, my dear, we want you to come to us for the whole day of the funeral at Woodleigh. Your spirits will naturally be depressed, vicariously, on that melancholy occasion, and it would never do for you to spend the day alone. Heber says you are far too much alone as it is, and he being, or having been, a medical man, must be esteemed good authority. We also greatly desire to have your excellent father to supper in the evening to meet his predecessor, who will by that time have joined us after the funeral! I must not forget to mention that the garden is beginning to look very bright and pretty, the whole bed under the south wall being a sea of yellow crocuses and anemones, and even some large Russian violets. Heber sat half an hour in the rustic Summer-house the other day, and said it was delicious. You know he is nearly as enthusiastic" (this word had been written and crossed out twice before the writer had made sure of the spelling) "as yourself about our garden. We are so pleased that you and your dear papa have made his acquaintance at last. We are longing to hear what you both think of him. And now, my dear, if you want any further inducement to come and spend a day with your attached friends at Abbeygates, let us bribe you with a letter received yesterday from our beloved niece at present in

Florence. I daresay you will have one yourself soon, but in the meantime here is ours to interest and amuse you. We are, of course, dreadfully sorry that Mildred is not at home just now; but it cannot be helped, and perhaps she and our dear clever Heber might not have got on so well together, as he seems disposed to get on with you, who are so clever and so sensible too. But I have spun out my intended note to a letter, and must now conclude, with our united kindest love; and, in the hope of a speedy and pleasant meeting,

"Remain,
"My dear young friend,
"Your most affectionate

" LUCINDA LAMB."

I laid this gratifying communication down with a smile, and when my father came in told him of the invitation he was

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to have, asking if there was any chance of his accepting it.

"I suppose I must, for once in a way," he said. "The dear old ladies have evidently set their innocent hearts upon having me, and it would be a bad compliment to Marsden to decline. I am glad you will have an entire day's change, Conny. You don't look quite your old self yet, and it will do you good to get a little petting from the sisters. This Woodleigh business has been depressing you sadly, I am afraid. When does the Colonel talk of making a start?"

"No mention of time as yet, papa," I answered, "and my opinion is that there will be a greater difficulty with Mrs. Graham than they anticipate, when it comes to the point. The Colonel has heard of a very quiet, healthy little town on the coast, in South Wales, quite amongst

the mountains. He wants, I believe, to go there. Its primitive name is Towyn, and it is within a short distance of Barmonth. They say the sea at Towyn is splendid. I wish, you dear old man, you were coming too."

"Ditto, my dear," he said, with a somewhat rueful laugh; "but doctors must wait for their holidays till they reach the land where there will be no patients to visit. We are not all as lucky as Marsden, who has turned his life into one long holiday, and need never do anything more fatiguing than strum a tune on a piano or an anthem upon a organ, if he doesn't like. Don't you think, Conny, that young man must have been born with a golden spoon in his mouth? Silver does not half express such good fortune as his."

"But you know I don't consider the privilege to be idle in a working world, vol. II.

good fortune, papa, and I doubt if he will, in the long run. You would not tolerate a life of unlimited leisure three months, as I have often heard you say, neither would it be good for you. It is not good for any man."

"True, most true, my dear little busy bee," he replied, with a sudden stretching out of his long, powerful arms to give a mild exercise to the thews and sinews with which he was so bountifully endowed, "what could I do with my great strength and vigour—God's own bestowments on me—if I did not work at least six days out of the week, and do a little service to my suffering fellow-creatures? Oh! Conny, it is a grand thing to have the power, as well as the will, to be helpful to others in a world where nearly all are wanting help. And then, child"—here the cheery voice grew low and reverential

—"we who are going down the hill of life, especially, have ever to bear in mind that 'the night cometh when no man can work.' For my part, God not forsaking me, I will die in harness."

These were exactly the sentiments to which my own heart gave a cordial and unhesitating echo. I could not understand their non-existence in any man into whose frame the great Creator had breathed the breath of life. It was because I had discovered at least the germ of them in Gilbert Radcliff, amidst all his temptations indolence and effeminacy, that I admired and liked him, and might, had our social positions been less wide apart, and our opportunities of meeting more frequent, have come to regard him with a still tenderer interest. That Heber Marsden, with his fine intellect, his intense appreciation of the beautiful, his upward yearning towards all that was high and noble in human nature (theoretically, at any rate), should be destitute of the love of work, struck me, now and ever, as one of the strangest of strange things; and though it did not lessen the mysterious attraction by which from the first I was drawn to him, it constantly came into my thoughts, and acted as a warning finger in pointing me away from the road I was so strongly, and with such unaccountable infatuation, tempted to tread.

Having rested during the greater part of the next day, I was feeling altogether stronger and better on the morning I was to go to Abbeygates. It was a clear frosty atmosphere, not very cold, but just sufficiently bracing to give a tone to the nerves, and to make out-of-door exercise pleasant. But I was thinking too much of the Woodleigh ceremonial, and of what

I could imagine would be the anguish of that poor mother to-day, to derive the advantage I might otherwise have done from external circumstances and surroundings.

I did not start till I had seen my father off to Woodleigh, and then I dressed myself, put up some work, and walked quietly through the old sleepy town, standing sometimes to look in at the shopwindows, because I seldom came into the streets, and I liked pretty things; standing always at the openings whence the bright river was visible, because I loved and admired its silvery brightness as much now as I had done on the first occasion of my walk with my father through the town; and, during my whole leisurely progress, speculating and wondering in a dreamy sort of way whether I should pass all my days at Lidmere, and if my tombstone would announce "To the memory of Constance Newton," at last.

I had a great idea that it would, and I assured myself now that I need desire no happier destiny. My father was dependent on me for his daily comfort and enjoyment; my duties had long been clearly marked out for me; I had health, I had friends, I had a home where I could always be mistress, and my responsibilities and anxieties were easy enough for even my weak shoulders to bear. What more could any reasonable woman desire?

"Hush, hush!" I said to a foolish, clamorous voice that seemed to be lifting itself up from some hidden depth of my being, and pleading its right to be heard—"hush, hush! pathetic voice of youth and womanhood. To the few of Eve's daughters, a full, crowned, blissful life—blissful, though some natural tears may

keep it green; to the many, the straight, grey, lonely road, wherein is missed the chance of children rising up to call her blessed, and of husband also praising her. But, thank God, both roads may alike lead to the celestial golden city!

I lifted the latch of the postern gate amongst the ivy (as this last thought went its way, with a myriad other buried fancies), and stood within the garden I loved, thinking only how beautiful the world was.

CHAPTER XI.

MISS PENELOPE OUTDOES HERSELF.

THE house had put on quite a festive dress in honour, as its mistresses said, of my coming to spend a whole day with them, and of their dear Dr. Newton taking his first meal under their roof. There were fresh flowers, such as the season produced, in all the vases; a pretty new jardinière, with hothouse plants, in the window; clean flowing muslin curtains under the sober green ones; and, to crown the whole, the sisters themselves, in their dove-coloured silks and soft lace caps, looking as happy and as animated as

though some very great and good thing had suddenly befallen them.

I think they did consider it a great and a good thing to have their dear Heber as a guest, and were charmed that my father and myself would now have abundant opportunities of learning to appreciate him.

Almost before I could get my walking things off, and settle to my work, they, or rather Miss Lamb for them both, had assailed me with questions as to my opinion of their cousin. So kind and friendly of Dr. Newton to have asked him to dinner immediately after his arrival in Lidmere; so nice of me to have presided at the table, and to have helped to entertain him. So beautifully everything had gone off (I wondered with secret amusement how he had put this last piece of information, and if it included the cooking to his satisfaction

of the Brobdingnagian cod's-head and shoulders), and so entirely had dear Heber enjoyed himself on the occasion.

"And there is nothing like a quiet family dinner for favouring intimacy," added Miss Lucinda, while Miss Penelope trotted to the side-board for cake and wine—which I must partake of whether I wanted such refreshments or not—" and you talk so admirably, my dear, that Heber could not fail to be charmed with your mental endowments, and you, on your part, would as inevitably find out and appreciate his. You think him very clever, do you not?"

"Oh! very," I said, smiling, and hoping I should be able to answer all the questions as easily and briefly.

"And attractive in his manners? A young man who *must* win his way with everybody."

- "I should think so. He seems to have endless resources."
- "That he undoubtedly has, dear boy! I don't mean that he is a boy, you know, Miss Newton" (Miss Lamb's accuracy in speaking was often a little tedious), "but we used to call him our boy years ago. And you would have discovered that he has the sweetest temper in the world?—this is one of Heber's special gifts."
- "Well, I have scarcely had time to make that discovery yet," I said, bending my head low over my work to hide an inclination to laugh; "but he looks good-tempered. The mouth has no suspicious lines about it."
- "Ah! I knew his mouth would strike you who are such a reader of faces. By-the-by, is he as much like Longfellow as his portrait led you to expect?"
 - "Quite; the resemblance is remarkable,

one being American and the other English. Oh! Miss Penelope," as the youngest sister placed before me something in the shape of rich cake and wine to which a Benjamin's portion would have looked foolish, "you cannot expect me to devour all this. The half of it would spoil my dinner, and I know you will want me to eat then."

"Oh! it is such a *nice* cake, my dear," expostulated Miss Penelope, in her little, tender, cooing voice, which was even more tender and more cooing this morning than usual, "and we had it made on purpose for you. *Do* try to eat it."

"Our dear young friend will try, Penelope," put in Miss Lamb, who, though the soul of hospitality, did not like being interrupted in her systematic catechising. "Oh"—turning again to me, while the click! click! of her knitting-needles kept

time to her chirping voice—" and so you see the likeness in the original as well as in the portrait. How very interesting!—but then, you know, Heber is really a poet too, though not an acknowledged one. We often say that had he chosen to devote himself to literature he might have been a second Byron, or Scott, or Wordsworth."

To this I could only remark "Indeed!" hoping that the brief comment would be associated by the charitable spinster with my laudable attempts to get through some portion of the preposterous luncheon forced upon me. I believe it was, for she remained silent for a minute or two, while I observed that Miss Penelope continued to hover near me, and to look as if she had something to say too, which she postponed saying in deference to her elder sister.

By-and-by, when I had swallowed

nearly the whole of my wine, and pushed aside the remnant of the meal, Miss Lamb resumed—

- "You have heard Heber play on his own organ. What did you think of that?"
- "I thought it very exquisite. I never really felt music before."
- "How exceedingly gratifying, and how gracefully expressed," said my tireless questioner, with beaming features. "I think if I might repeat that to Heber—all else you have acknowledged I will hold sacred—it would delight him beyond everything, and quite give him new inspiration for Sunday. You are aware that he is to play the church organ on Sunday, are you not?"
- "I heard him tell Colonel Graham he should do so; but I do not wish anything you have drawn from me repeated to Dr. Marsden, dear Miss Lamb. Second-hand

remarks are a mistake, and he must know, without praise of mine or anybody's, that his music is wonderful."

"Well, my dear, of course he does," assented his admiring cousin; "but appreciation from those whose opinion we value, and whose strict candour we cannot doubt, is pleasant and even profitable sometimes. However, I will respect your wish, and consider all we have now been saying—all you have been saying, I mean, entirely private. My dear Pen "—looking earnestly at her fidgeting sister,—"what are you waiting to observe?"

As the modest and tender Penelope rarely made any observations on her own account, the question was perhaps a natural one, though it put the little spinster in quite a flutter of excitement, in the midst of which her words tumbled out, one after another, most amusingly.

"I was only thinking," she said apologetically to her elder, "that, as we have elicited from our dear young friend her opinion of Heber, it would be only fair to tell her in return his opinion of her. May I tell her, dear Lucinda?"

Miss Lucinda—(I should mention that they both seemed quite oblivious of any possible sensitiveness of mine while all this was going on)—Miss Lucinda, thus appealed to, bridled and shook her sausage curls and her apple cheeks for half a Then she replied, with the mildminute. est of frowns-

"I think not, Penelope. It never occurred to me that it would be justifiable. Dear Heber is so frank and open with us, but he does not mean his cousinly confidences to go beyond. Miss Newton"here she looked over at me and my red cheeks affectionately and sympathetically —"is sure that he thinks highly of her, and of her talents. No man of taste and ordinary capacity could do otherwise; but the words he spoke were spoken to us, just as Miss Newton's have been now. Let us, in both cases, have respect to the speaker's trust in our discretion and honour."

Such a model speech could not fail to send poor Miss Penelope subdued and a little pensive to her seat and her knitting. Miss Lamb seemed to think she might have hurt her sister's feelings by the implied rebuke (the spinsters were so lovingly devoted to each other), and to rally her spirits she changed the conversation to the subject of Mildred and her letter, which she asked Miss Penelope to read aloud.

This the latter did, but it proved much less amusing than the one I had recently

received myself, giving, in the first place, a brief description of Florence—copied, I was certain, from a guide book, in the comfortable assurance that the innocent aunts would never suspect the fact—and, in the second place, telling them she was going to have lessons in music and singing from a celebrated Italian master, and that she meant to work very hard at both. "That precious Constance," she added, "has so dinned the subject of work, as the best of all things on earth, into mebless her pretty toiling hands and head! that I feel I must work or collapse abrupt-Now, music being my only speciality, I am taking up that noble art, and I hope to astonish you all when I come home."

There was nothing else of any interest in the letter, except a hurried addendum to the effect that they believed Gilbert was really coming at last, and that she (Mildred) supposed he would stay now as long as they did, and return with them about the end of May.

Miss Lamb was called out of the room soon after we had discussed this epistle in all its bearings, and no sooner had the door closed on her than, to my immense amusement, Miss Penelope sprang from her seat, and, with her little fat cheeks kindling, her round blue eyes sparkling, and her whole aspect expressive of importance and mystery, came and stood immediately in front of me.

"My dear, I hope I shall have time, and I hope I am not doing anything very wrong. I never do go counter to Lucinda, you know, and she is a great deal wiser than I am; but, oh, dear! I was young once myself, and perhaps" (here the little tender sigh I was familiar with became a succession of agitated gasps, accompanied by

dewy eyes and a pink flush over all the soft old face)-"and perhaps I knew rather more of the great mystery of human attractions and sympathies than dear Lucinda suspects, or than she ever knew herself. This is, however, neither here nor there" (the little spinster was growing already dreadfully frightened and hopelessly confused), "and I know I am straining a point in telling you what my sister thinks should not be told. She has gone down to make some wine sauce for a cabinet pudding, and it won't take her more than ten minutes, and the time is getting on; but, my dear, Heber does think so much of you, and he said it was all our fault-Lucinda's fault, of course, since she wrote the letters—for giving such a seductive account of you from the first. He declares he was in love with you before you met, and that he found

you nicer and sweeter in every respect than he had anticipated. He kept repeating that night when he had dined at your house, 'She has dove's eyes—the only dove's eyes in a woman's face I ever saw. You never told me, either of you, that she had dove's eyes.' And, oh! dear "-with a trembling glance towards the door by which the sister she was disobeying might enter at any moment-"he said lots and lots more than I should like to tell you if I could remember it at a moment's notice; but my brain was never a very clear one-Heber declares I am getting too fat to be good for much, and he is going to try his hand at taking me down a stone or sobut, you see, Lucinda, though she has the highest opinion in the world of you, and believes you would suit Heber wonderfully, had set her heart on bringing him and our dear Mildred together, especially

after Mildred had assured us that Mr. Gilbert Radcliff warmly admired you, and that she thought you were kindly disposed towards him. Well, my dear, it would be a splendid match, no doubt, and not even for Heber's sake would I wish to stand in your way"—(dear old simple soul, how could she stand in my way?)—"but still if you liked Heber best, why, love is better than lucre, and if I were young again tomorrow, which I hope our Friend above will mercifully keep me from ever wishing to be; but if I was young again to-morrow, and both these gentlemen were suing for my hand, I am sure I should prefer Heber, though I might grieve at missing a fine position and that lovely park, with the lake and the venerable trees; and I am sure it's a pity, as one may say, that you cannot have both-I don't exactly mean two husbands, my dear, of course, only I

express myself so badly and being in such a panic lest Lucinda should abruptly return—what I meant was the love on the one part and the wealth and position on the other. But you are not vexed with me, my dear child, are you?" as I laid my hand at length appealingly on her arm, and entreated to be allowed to speak. "I have gone against Lucinda and my own conscience entirely to give you pleasure, and because I was young once—"

"Dear Miss Penelope"—I broke in with determination here—"I am not angry, and I thank you for all your kind intentions, but I am not in love with either of the gentlemen in question, nor can I submit to have their names coupled with mine. Mildred was very wrong in talking the nonsense she did about Mr. Radcliff, whose social standing alone would forbid the idea, if there was nothing else, of my ever

thinking of him as a possible lover of mine. I hope you neither of you repeated to Dr. Marsden this absurd imagining of that flighty child's. I have a special objection to being married in anticipation by my friends, or of being talked of in relation to love and lovers at all. I have told Mildred this twenty times."

Poor Miss Penelope fluttered and twittered and reddened in an increased degree under my grave expostulations and question, to which, as she saw I waited for a reply, she blurted out an agitated answer at last.

"I am afraid, my dear, Lucinda did just mention that you were the object of Mr. Radcliff's fervent admiration—yes, I know she said 'fervent admiration,' because the words struck me at the moment as strong ones—but she added that we knew nothing of your sentiments towards him, and I am

sure she said something also about your being too sensible and too devoted to your papa and your home duties to have any restless craving to change your state. Heber was certainly very anxious to learn all we could tell him of Mr. Gilbert's attentions to you, and he set it down as a positive fact that the young gentleman must be deeply in love, because, he said, no man could be much in your society without discovering that you were the very sweetest woman in the world. And then Lucinda, who saw he was in desperate earnest, told him there was nothing against his trying to win you; and oh, my dear"-clasping tight the small chubby hands which had never ministered to husband or child, but, had destiny been less cruel, would have done to both so tenderly and lovingly—"oh, my dear, I cannot help being intensely interested, and wishing

dear Heber full success in his wooing, if he has courage to woo, for I was young once——"

I was spared the finale of Miss Penelope's thrilling reminiscence this time by the sudden opening of the door and the re-appearance of Miss Lucinda.

I don't know whether she observed my discomposed face, and her sister's guilty one, for dinner was announced at the same minute, and we all adjourned to the dining-room.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE "DREAM-GARDEN" ALONE.

I SPENT nearly the whole afternoon in the garden, knowing that the sisters were in the habit of indulging, between dinner and tea, in a little comfortable, though unadmitted nap, which my presence might have interfered with, and wanting also to think out, quietly and uninterruptedly, a variety of thoughts that were thronging and pressing upon me. Amongst these some were conflicting, some were puzzling, many were anxious; but throughout them all there ran a silver thread which sparkled and glittered mar-

vellously, charming my foolish eyes, and tempting me to grasp it tightly and bid it stay, while the faithful voice, whose admonishings I had meant to heed, warned me to battle with the sweet and subtle tempter, and to dismiss it for ever.

I went for refuge and meditation into the same Summer-house where I had sat on the first evening of my introduction to this wondrous garden, and I recalled all the vague dreamy sensations that had passed through my mind and softened my My calm life had been so heart then. singularly free from emotions and distractions of a merely personal kind, and I had learned to accept so contentedly the repose which this involved, that to be launched, suddenly, upon a stormy sea, to be given over, without a note of warning, to constant excitement and unrest, was, to say the least of it, a state of things eminently

calculated to set a stronger woman than myself thinking seriously, and asking her half frightened heart whether it willed that matters should continue thus.

But could I altogether help it that Miss Penelope's disclosures, absurdly put as they were, would keep coming into my mind, as I sat there alone, in a silence and a quiet that lulled the spirit magically—and that thus coming they brought with them a sense of sweetness sonovel and so strange to me that I could not but taste the unfamiliar food, and, tasting, desire to banquet upon what seemed to be so freely and so eagerly offered to me.

For a little while—nay, for the whole time, I think, that I remained in my dreamgarden that memorable afternoon—I abandoned myself to such thoughts and imaginings as come to young and happy women when love, as a principle of life, is

first revealed to them. For that little while, I walked as a queen in an enchanted world; I was wafted up amongst golden tinted clouds; I sailed upon a bright and sparkling sea; I saw visions I had never seen before; and then I awoke with a start, and called myself names that it would not be pretty to repeat. I knew I had been wandering in a fool's paradise, and though I might not readily forget how very fair were some of its flower-strewn roads, how passing sweet many of its hills and valleys, I had got my feet planted safe upon more solid ground again, and they must be forbidden any future straying.

But what, it may reasonably be asked by an inquiring, straightforward reader, is all this sentimental fuss about? Why should it be a crime or a folly to grow attached to a man who is free and eligible, and disposed to think Constance Newton the most charming and desirable woman in the whole world? What law of God or man can be opposed to these two, if they love one another, being joined together in holy matrimony?

My good, objecting friend, I can only reply that I was haunted, persecuted, beset by the warning voice I have before told you of—the voice, as I believed, of my protecting angel. The stronger grew my interest in Heber Marsden and my foolish exulting over his interest in me, the more clearly defined and importunate became that strange intuition which assured me that we were never made for each other, and that the very love-born of intellectual affinities and perhaps mutual personal admiration-which would unite us, would be the discoverer to us, later, of our real uncongeniality, and the intensifer of our wedded unhappiness.

I say that an inner sense, an intuition very rare in such cases, made all this as clear as noonday to me, and helped me, for his sake as much as for my own, to resolve on foregoing the cup of nectar which had come so near my lips, to stop my ears to all the music that the whole creation would have sung to me, and to keep my feet from straying into that enchanted land, amidst whose glories I had lost my head in the sylvan temple that idle afternoon.

When I went indoors in the chill twilight, having grown somewhat chill myself, I had talked down every rebellious emotion so effectually that I was quite proud of my work, and reasoned complacently that I could afford to be gracious and agreeable to Dr. Marsden when we met presently, because I never should advance beyond this, and because, too, in a week or so, I should leave him behind me (was I not

going with the Grahams purposely to avoid him? Oh, how wise and discreet I was!) and our paths in life might never probably cross again.

The spinsters and I sat and worked and chatted by the fireside till, at about eight o'clock, my father and Dr. Marsden, who had met at the house of a mutual acquaintance, came in together, and gave us the details of the mournful ceremony they had both been present at in the morning.

It seemed that poor Mrs. Graham had lost such complete control over herself when they came to remove the coffin that, at the last moment, my father had to give up going to the funeral, and to remain with her. This he did that the Colonel might not be deprived of the privilege—a sad one indeed it was—of following his child to the grave; and, in the end, my

father had succeeded in calming his excited and half desperate charge.

Dr. Marsden had subsequently given up half-a-dozen engagements to remain with the stricken parents on this the saddest of all days succeeding a death in a household. My father told it of him, and added, in his kindly way—

"I like to record such friendly deeds, for, let me tell you, the very atmosphere of Woodleigh, and of every room, once so bright and pleasant, within it, is stifling—morally—just now. One feels the presence, and hears the footsteps, of a heavy, voiceless sorrow, and I don't believe there are many young men, especially popular ones like my friend Marsden here, who would voluntarily immure themselves for a whole long day in such a haunted place."

"Bah!" exclaimed the younger doctor lightly, interrupting his highly gratified

cousins, as they were about to break forth -their faces said so-into some enthusiastic eulogy-"bah! my dear sir. You take a superficial view of human merit. The most good-natured people in the world are often the most selfish, only their selfishness assumes a less repulsive form than that of those who never put themselves out of the way to serve others, and take the best of all they can get. Miss Newton is looking prepared to argue this out with me-but I can't argue to-night. I am tired, not bodily, but I suppose from the unseen presence of the ghosts at Woodleigh that Dr. Newton has spoken of."

The dear, hospitable old ladies had made ready such a gorgeous supper, such a literal feast of fat things in honour of my father's first social evening with them, and of their cousin being, for the first time since his boyhood, domesticated beneath their roof, that it seemed a pity their lavish providings should meet with so little appreciation from those for whom the dainty banquet was intended.

My father was, however, one of the most abstemious men in the world on principle, and often said he could not afford to waste his physical powers by indulging in luxurious living of any kind. Except in the articles of tea and milk, which he could certainly swallow as a whale swallows water, I never knew him exceed the limits of extreme moderation, and the poor little spinsters were in despair when he firmly declined dish after dish of their tempting viands, and restricted himself to a little cold meat and salad.

As for Dr. Marsden, he ate nothing but a biscuit with his wine, making a headache his plea, but manifesting tokens of being in a frame of mind when bodily claims become a mere impertinence. I had noticed from his first entrance that he was dull and abstracted, but during supper this grew, till his anxious cousins assailed him with innumerable questions as to his health, and my father, who doubtless saw no cause for anxiety, rallied him about having got a fit of the blues, and advised him to go and smoke a cigar in the garden by moonlight.

"You must have had such a day of it up at Woodleigh that anything is excusable," he added, as Dr. Marsden looked vexed at exciting observation. "Go and blow a good cloud, friend, and let the stars and the still night talk to you. Here's Conny will keep you company, if you prefer society. Like all young ladies, she dotes upon moonlight, and moonlight in this gem of a garden will be quite a new revelation to her."

Dr. Marsden looked at me as my father spoke, but he did not say a word. thought he was indifferent as to whether I went or not, and this made me the more ready to go. I wanted to find out what was really wrong with him, to comfort him a little if I might; but I could not volunteer my companionship upon my father's kindly meant suggestion alone. Miss Penelope, having waited a minute to give the gentleman an opportunity of expressing the delight he should feel in having me with him, and the gentleman expressing nothing of the kind, plucked up courage for once to speak on her own account, and without even knowing her elder sister's sentiments on the subject.

"Oh! do go, my dear," she said eagerly (the tender little soul was doubtless remembering she had been young once herself), "you can't imagine how pretty and romantic the old garden is by moonlight and there will be glow-worms under the yew-hedges—Heber used to find lots there when he was a boy. And you can wear my warm knitted shawl and Lucinda's hood, that she pops on when she goes into the cellar, not to trouble to put your walking things on, you know. And you will have a lovely view of the Great Bear and of the Pleiades; and, but for rheumatism, I should delight in going too, for a walk after supper is a fine thing, only you have none of you eaten a mouthful; and we shall enjoy a chat with your good father here, while you young people are out; and he can have his cigar with his spirits and water—oh! dear, how stupid I am, forgetting he is a teetotaller, or next thing to it; but Lucinda and myself don't mind a cigar once in a way, having had many years ago a papa who smoked.

Heber, dear fellow! will be all the better for a mild eigarette in the garden; and you'll go with him, my dear, for the sake of the glow-worms and the Great Bear, and I'll just ring for Ruth to bring the shawl and hood."

But Dr. Marsden sprang himself to the bell, and probably, by this suggestive action, induced the elder spinster to say, with somewhat less of eagerness than the younger had exhibited,

"If you are not afraid of taking cold, my dear Miss Newton, I am sure Heber will feel honoured by your accompanying him for ten minutes, and you will find the garden, which is thoroughly sheltered, very enjoyable this mild night."

So it was all settled for us, and I made no protest, except against the frightful, salmon-coloured hood, in which dear Miss Penelope would have arrayed me. I asked Ruth to bring me my own hat when she brought the shawl, and though both sisters thought the hood would have answered best, I was allowed to have my way, in consideration, I suppose, of my complaisance in going out with a hipped young man to look for glow-worms on the green earth, and for "fire-flies tangled in a silver braid" in the starry heavens.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE "DREAM-GARDEN" WITH A COMPANION.

"DID you think I did not want you to come with me?" were the first words my companion said, as soon as we were out of the house, with the moon and the stars shining down upon us, and upon all the sweet, tranquil garden.

"It looked very like it," I replied, in a jesting tone, for I had no intention of being sentimental myself or of giving him an excuse for being so; "but the room was too insufferably hot for further endurance, and to escape from such a fever atmosphere, I was willing to lay

aside any troublesome sensitiveness. Besides, I have to look for glow-worms, and you to smoke a cigar; we need not interfere with each other in the least."

"Then you did not consent to come," he asked, in a disappointed tone, "because you knew, instinctively, that I did want you, and because, being a tender-hearted, pitiful woman, you liked the thought of comforting a heavy-hearted man."

"How could I suppose I should have any skill to comfort you?" I said evasively—"not, in the first place, having the faintest notion of what is the matter with you, if it is more than a headache, or the natural depression from the influences of the day you have spent."

He was silent for a minute or two, during which we paced, side by side, up one of the yew-tree paths leading to the terrace and the Summer-houses. Then he said—

"Do you believe that the cases of Satanic possession recorded in the New Testament mean literally that demons entered into human beings and tormented them, or that it was only some form of lunacy, which the simple people of that age did not understand?"

"I believe exactly what is stated," I replied, wondering what novel speculation had entered his speculating brain now. "How can we do otherwise, when we read of the way in which Jesus of Nazareth dealt with such cases? How could he have commanded madness to go out of a man, and to enter a herd of swine?"

"True; but I need no arguments to convince me that your view is the right one. I go even beyond this, for I believe the same dire affliction may befall a man

in the present day. Why not? We are never told that it came to an end in the olden times. Miss Newton, you may be shocked and revolted; you may think I am talking wildly, but I assure you it is my firm conviction that an evil spirit takes possession of me at given seasons, and produces the overwhelming, intolerable depression of which I am the helpless subject to-night. Do you think I am talking wildly?"

"Very much so," I said, in the coolest and most practical tone I could assume; "and it surprises me that any person with common sense can indulge in such fancies. Depression, even of a very marked kind, is common to sensitive and nervous temperaments, which, by-the-by, is rather an amusing piece of information to come from me to a learned doctor, and you have been all day in an atmosphere of exceptional

gloom. Light your cigar—I shall enjoy the scent of it in the open air,—and I will meditate, while you smoke, on the mysteries of human life and circumstance."

"I would rather you talked to me," he said, with a droll little childlike pleading in his voice-men are wonderfully like children when they are sick or sorry-"I want to get quite out of myself, and you always speak wisely and well. Admitting that my blue devils are not actually from below-and I think they must be, from their unmitigated venom and maliciousness—they are still grievously vexatious, horribly tormenting, and they leave me, when they do depart at last, as feeble and limp and impotent in mind and body as the demoniacs left the poor man in one of the cases we read of in the gospels. ashamed to make the confession-it seems unmanly as well as absurd—but nobody in

trouble of any kind could look into your calm, sympathizing face, and not be tempted to draw upon your sympathy."

"But sympathy," I said, "is so very limited in its power to aid. If I tell you I am sorry for you, what do you gain? Just the knowledge that I am sorry for you, and nothing more. I cannot, by my grieving, drive your dark fit away; I cannot, by my utmost sorrow, put a ray of gladness into your heart; I cannot, even by any amount of preaching, or scolding, or advising, convince you that you might struggle against this sort of thing, and overcome it. I believe you might, and especially if you took up some earnest work again. Dr. Marsden, if I were a man I would rather work in a coal-mine, or as the commonest navvy, than not work at all. I don't mean to suggest that you are absolutely idle, but you would be

the better for regular and stated work, such as you were accustomed to do as a country doctor. Fancy my dear old father having leisure for a fit of blue devils."

You observe, dear reader, how true I was still to all my good resolutions—how courageously I parried every attempt of the adversary to weaken my arms and soften my heart by insinuations concerning my power over the man I would have loved to soothe and comfort openly.

"You cannot, you cannot, you cannot," he repeated, in a half querulous, half piteous tone. "Miss Newton, you don't know what you could if you would, and I am afraid to tell you. Already you have done me good; some subtle invisible essence from your calm, pure nature has been conveyed into mine, whether through sympathy or magnetic attraction, what does it matter? Now if I had my organ

here I might charm away the still lingering mists, as David charmed Saul's dark mood away with his harp and voice. Do you know, sometimes when I am playing all alone, especially in Lidmere Church, I seem to be taken quite out of the body, and to mount up into a cloud region where all sights and sounds are unfamiliar and strange, but of a beauty passing description."

"I suppose you must be a musician to understand this," I said, thinking of Colonel Graham's remark about Heber Marsden having been intended for a less material planet than the one he had accidentally been introduced into; "but there is Mildred's piano in the house. Can you not play on that, when we go in? My father has never heard you play yet. He will be delighted."

"I wish you were a musician," he exvol. ft.

claimed abruptly. "You have no conception what your life has lost by music having been left out of it. Shall we sit for five minutes in this classical temple (which, by-the-by, is the only thing out of place in the whole garden), or are you afraid of being longer in the night air?"

"I am not afraid of getting cold," I replied; "but the cigar is yet unsmoked, and the glow-worms yet unfound. What will they say indoors, if we present ourselves with the objects for which we were sent out unaccomplished?"

"I don't want to smoke," he said, almost cheerfully; "your good father provided me a better remedy than the one he suggested, in providing me with you; but come back into the yew-tree path, and I will show you where I used to look for glow-worms when I was a boy. How de-

licious the garden is to-night! I wish we could stay out another hour."

We did not discover a single glow-worm, but we did discover a variety of subjects to talk about—there could be no harm in talking with any man, as friend to friend—and when at length, on my suggestion, we returned to the supper-room, I was astonished, if not shocked, to learn from Miss Lamb the length of time we had been away.

"But if you have enjoyed it, my dear," she said kindly, while every feature of Miss Penelope's rosy face beamed with sympathy and satisfaction, "and if dear Heber's headache is better, I am sure none of us shall complain; and we will now adjourn to the drawing-room and ask our cousin for a little music. Dr. Newton has been saying he has never heard him play."

We went into the drawing-room, and we

had the music; and I from a shaded corner listened breathlessly without comment or praise to the inspired strains, the wondrous expression, through human fingers, on a mechanical instrument, of a soul's experiences of the deepest anguish mounting up gradually to a state of jubilant and triumphant happiness. To say that there was genius in Heber Marsden's playing was to say nothing that even approached the truth. It was the passion of a whole fervent human life laid bare to human gaze through a medium that idealised and glorified it, and made the entranced listener feel that to have a part in the sorrow and the joy thus marvellously revealed would be worth the sacrifice of all besides.

Alas! I had not gone many steps tonight, in spite of my wise swelling words and counsels, in the straight safe road I had so firmly resolved on treading. I had learned that I could comfort and bless one too dangerously attractive to me already, and there is no true-hearted woman in the universe who would not risk her own individual happiness for the sake of ministering, however humbly, to that of a man who has once acknowledged his dependence upon her.

When Dr. Marsden rose from the piano, making some casual remark upon the superiority of the instrument, as if to that, and not to himself, was to be ascribed the merit of the wondrous performance, my father and the proud old spinster cousins were enthusiastic in their praises, and made so many flattering speeches that the musician had to beg them to desist.

"If it were not sacrilege to talk of turning such a talent into money I should say you have twenty fortunes in your fingers, Marsden," observed my father, who really knew no more of music than Gilbert Radcliff professed to do, but had admired and wondered over this music as he would instinctively have done had he heard the great god Pan blow on the pipes he made down by the reeds of the river.

"I shall never turn it into money," said the young man lightly, "unless there was no other way of winning something I earnestly coveted." Then he came over to my quiet corner, and asked if his playing had pleased me to-night.

"It has borne me so far away from the solid earth," I said, "that my words would be lost in the distance if I tried to express my pleasure and wonder. What was it you played? I can just manage that matter-of-fact question."

"It was nothing till I played it," he replied, looking gratified and bright, "for

it was an improvisation, as I felt sure you would discover and understand. We will call it 'out of the depths'—the depths from which you raised me, my calm, serene monitress, my good angel!"

"Time to go, Conny, time to go," called my father from the other end of the room, and, rising instantly, I went upstairs, escorted by both the sisters, and in another ten minutes had left Abbeygates and its inmates behind me, and was walking, as in a dream, by my silent father's side, through the sleepy and now literally sleeping old town of Lidmere.

CHAPTER XIV.

BREAD EATEN IN SECRET.

EXCEPT for the organ playing on Sunday, which once more drew me up into some celestial region from whence it was not pleasant to descend, there were no outward incidents during the whole of the next week to direct my thoughts, in any special manner, towards the guest at Abbeygates. The weather had turned damp and gloomy, and as I had caught a little fresh cold (probably while sitting alone in the garden on the afternoon of my visit to the spinsters), my father would not let me go out at all, and nobody came

to call upon me. I was very busy though, making myself a few new dresses and repairing my old ones for my anticipated trip with the Grahams. The Colonel had sent me word by my father that his poor wife would not hear at present of any change, but that he had every hope of prevailing on her to undertake the journey by about the middle of April-it was now early in March-which would be a more desirable time than the present for the sojourn in so comparatively bleak a country I was partly glad and partly as Wales. sorry at the delay. I wanted to feel myself at a safe distance from all dangerous influences, and at the same time I liked the consciousness of nearness to Abbeygates, and the little excitement of watching hourly for the possible appearance of one of its inmates.

I concluded, however, that Dr. Marsden

was fulfilling some of those numerous engagements of which he had spoken to Colonel Graham and myself on the last occasion of our meeting at Woodleigh, and though my solitary days seemed a little longer than they had ever used to seem, I did not, for a moment, resent his not coming.

One morning, towards the end of the week, the sisters from Abbeygates called to ask how I was, having heard accidentally, the day before, of the renewal of my cold, and being in despair at the thought that I might have committed some imprudence at their house. They brought me a basket filled with jellies and delicate preserved fruits, and dear Miss Penelope had knitted me a garden-hood of a more becoming shape and hue than the salmon-coloured abomination I had declined wearing when I took my moonlight walk with their cousin.

"We have seen scarcely anything of Heber since you were with us," Miss Lamb said abruptly, in one of the pauses of conversation. "His old friends and patients are literally taking entire possession of him, and when he is not visiting he is generally at the organ in the church. Dear fellow! we like him, you know, to be happy in his own way, and we are sure of him, at least for an hour, the last thing every night."

I wanted dreadfully to ask at what hours in the day he went for practice to the church, but every time I began to frame the simple question, an inner consciousness set my weak heart beating so violently that I was obliged to give it up. Before my visitors left, however, good little Miss Penelope gave me the information, without knowing how much I had desired it. The elder sister had walked to the window

to see if it was raining, and the younger, taking prompt advantage of this, whispered eagerly, in her plaintive, cooing voice—

"My dear child, Heber is dying to come and see you, only he is afraid your father would not like it, and that you might think it an intrusion. I shall manage, now you are unwell, to send him with a message of inquiry or something. And when you get out again, he plays the organ from about three to five every day, and you may be glad, if you are passing at any time, just to creep in and listen to it. Oh, dear, it is very natural—two young hearts full of poetry and mental gifts. I gave you a hint the other day of a slight—it was slight, certainly, and never came to anything,—but of a slight romance belonging to my own youth. Well, my dear, the hero of that drama was a born poet, though he never put two lines together in

his life; only, you know, it breathed in every look and in every word; it oozed forth with every——"

"Penelope, my love, it does not rain, I find, and we had better betrotting off," called out Miss Lamb from the window. "There is another and a heavier shower brewing, and we must make our way home as fast as we can. Our sweet young friend will excuse our abrupt departure."

"How provoking!" was the softly uttered comment of poor Miss Penelope, whose cheeks continued to glow from the pleasant excitement of her cruelly interrupted reminiscence; and when, from real sympathy with her innocent buried love affair, and out of gratitude for all her well-meant interest in mine, I whispered, in return—"It is, indeed; but you must tell me more when we can be alone," she said meekly—"But, of course, poor, dear Lucinda did

not know what she was interrupting; she never knew what was going on at the time of its occurrence, for it was slight, certainly—I am bound to admit that it was slight, and it came to nothing."

Miss Lamb, who had been detained at the window fastening on her goloshes, now joined us, and expedited her sister's preparations for departure. Miss Penelope was very nervous and tremulous, and I thought she would never be ready. As they went at length out of the room, she turned round and held up three fingers of her right hand, and then all five of her left, trying to make her button of a mouth express, by the most ludicrous contortions, the word organ without any audible sound.

As I nodded and smiled in reply, she ambled off after her sister, quite contented and happy, her thoughts, I have no doubt, divided equally between the love affair she was watching (I was not responsible, dear reader, for Miss Penelope's view of the matter), and the one that was so slight and that came to nothing, in the years of long ago.

The next day Dr. Marsden did make his appearance with some violets from the garden, and the tender love of his affectionate cousins; but as ill luck would have it—I mean, of course, and meant then, good luck—a lady neighbour was calling on me at the same time, and she, being a great talker, and a great gossip, sat him out, with a determination worthy of a nobler cause. Nota bene—This lady had three marriageable daughters, all of them charming young ladies, if a trifle fast, and all of them, report said, to be had for the asking.

Dr. Marsden did not admire them, and

I don't think, after the experience of the morning in question, that he had any great regard for their mother.

I put the violets in water when I was again alone, looked at them, smelt at them, imagined the precise spot they came from during the whole day. There was no harm in delighting in violets in the early Spring-time, when scarcely any other scented flowers were in bloom; and I had escaped so nicely the danger that might have been involved in a long morning's interview with the donor that my mind and conscience were comfortably at rest, and I decided that, if the next day were tolerably fine, I might go without a moment's hesitation or misgiving, to listen, unseen myself, to the organ playing.

The next day was fine, and a little after three I slipped out quietly, though there was nobody in the house to suspect me of wrong-doing, and walked, at a rapid pace, towards the church, which I entered by the only open side door, making my way, with a fluttering heart and burning cheeks, to a high pew just under the organ-loft, and squeezing myself up into its farthest corner.

Dr. Marsden had commenced his practice, and was making his ardent soul talk through his fingers.

How the full chords rose and fell! how the ineffable sweetness pervaded the whole cathedral church! how it entered into my heart, thrilled all my senses, and created a pleasure that approached the confines of pain.

I must have been there quite an hour, though it seemed less than half that time, and then, as the twilight was fast drawing on, I thought it would be prudent to withdraw, and, sweet as my bread eaten in

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secret had been, to leave the rich banquet unfinished.

I crept down the sombre aisle on tiptoe—an absurd precaution, inasmuch as the music above would have drowned the heaviest footfall, only conscience doth make cowards of us all—and got safely out into the darkening streets. I was not accustomed to be abroad so late alone, and I walked on rapidly, feeling, now that my enjoyment was over, that I had been a little rash, and not a little weak, in snatching at it with such childish eagerness.

I was nearly at my own door, congratulating myself that, at all events, it was still much too early for my father to have returned, when I heard a quick, light footstep behind me—it was beside me in another minute, and a surprised voice saying in lowered tones—

"Miss Newton, is it possible? What can

have brought you out—an invalid too—at this late hour? Have you a district that can only be visited in the gloaming?"

"How you startled me, Dr. Marsden!" I replied, with a view of gaining time to conceal what I had really been doing, without departing from the truth. "It is not late at all."

"It is too late for you to be here, anyhow," he said concernedly, and then a thought seemed to strike him abruptly, and he asked, in a still lower and decidedly eager voice—

"You cannot have been to the church. I am flattering myself too grossly even to conceive of such a thing. Will you tell me where you have been?"

Thrust thus cruelly into a corner, I had no choice but to reply in the most indifferent tone I could assume.

"There need be no mystery about so

simple a matter. I have been to the church, Dr. Marsden. Miss Penelope told me yesterday at what hours you usually practised, and I was tired of staying indoors, and of my own company generally, and so I thought I would just go and hear you play. Though no musician, I love the organ, and anybody would enjoy listening to such a master of the art as yourself——"

I stopped abruptly, awaking to the fact that I was justifying myself too anxiously not to excite suspicion, and my companion being, in spite of his ideality, a man of keen observation when it suited him to observe, evidently saw the matter in the same light.

"Don't apologize," he said, softly and earnestly, "for what I can only feel honoured at. Do you know, you have given me a cup of wine so rich and sweet that I

shall live upon it for days to come. Don't grudge it me," he added pleadingly, as I was about to speak and make a jest of his metaphor. "I need the refreshing stimulant, after a week's starvation. By-the-by, when are you going to Woodleigh again?"

"Oh, I don't know," I said airily; "next week, probably. The Colonel has sent several times to ask when I can go. But what is your motive, if any, for inquiring?"

"Why," he answered, a little damped, I fancied, at my light manner—"that I should have begged permission to walk there with you. I want to see our friends myself, and I have been getting through some half hundred of my many engagements. But perhaps you would decline my escort again?"

"That depends," I said, still keeping on the safe side of sentiment and seriousness. "If it happened that you were going on the same day, and at the same hour, I should be glad of a companion, but I never like people to give up their time or their leisure expressly for me. I have been accustomed, from my earliest years to be perfectly independent."

"Whatever you have been accustomed to," he said, "it has made you wholly original, and dissimilar from every other woman in the universe. But here is our short walk come to an end. I know you don't mean to ask me in, and I will not be ungenerous enough to place you in the dilemma of having to say 'no,' should I invite myself. Good evening, Miss Newton. You cannot quite freeze me after the draught of wine I received just now, at your perhaps unwilling hands. My whole heart is still warm and glowing from it, and next week you may be very sure I

shall happen to be going to Woodleigh on the same day and at the same hour as yourself."

"All right," I laughed, as I tendered him my hand carelessly. "My best love to the dear people at Abbeygates. Don't knock, please, Dr. Marsden. I have a latch key to save trouble to the servants. Good night, and thank you for your music and for your present escort."

I opened the door and went in, as he pursued his way slowly down the street. My mirthfulness had all vanished, as I crept noiselessly upstairs, not caring that the household should know or comment on my late return. I was only a few minutes taking off my walking wraps, and dressing for the evening, as my father liked me always, after a simple fashion, to do. Then I went down, meaning to get some work, and have a cup of tea while waiting

for my dear old man to come in to his dinner.

As I opened our sitting-room door, I was considerably startled by the apparition of some very long legs stretching out from a chair by the fireside. It was too dark for me to see more than the legs, the fire having burnt rather low, but I heard a voice which said to me in familiar accents,

"Eh, Conny, my child, and so you're here at last. Now wherever have you been? I was just going to instruct the town-crier on your behalf."

CHAPTER XV.

FALTERING RESOLUTIONS.

"WHY, papa," I retorted, half amused at the result of the first little bit of girlish trickiness I had ever attempted in my life, "what has brought you home so early? You are quite an hour before your usual time."

"Business growing slack, my dear," was his jocose reply, "and nobody better pleased than myself that it is so. But, Conny, you are not going to be let off making a clean breast of it by counter questions. I come home, glad and joyful, to be refreshed by the society of my home

Birdie, and lo, and behold! the home Birdie has flown. Conny, Conny, what does it all mean? 'I ask as one who seeks to know.'"

Of course he did, dear, precious, inquisitive man! and of course I had, as in the former case, to tell the truth, making again as light as I could of it.

"To listen to the organ, eh?" he said, after a minute's pause, and stirring the fire into a blaze. "Why, my child, surely this ardent love of music is a newly-awakened principle in you, who never learnt a note in your life. It is true Marsden plays like an Orpheus, or like your friend the great god Pan; but—but—what, I ask again, does it all mean, Conny? Am I to lose my only child, my little fireside companion and daughter?"

There was a wistfulness in my father's voice, joined to an unwonted tender-

ness, which touched me deeply and instantly.

"A thousand times no, you dear, foolish old man!" I said, half crying, because I was a fool too. "I would not leave you as long as I can be a help and a comfort to you for anybody in the wide world. But indeed," I added, with a feeble attempt at a laugh, "nobody has asked me to do so, therefore your fears and my protestations are singularly premature, to say the least of them. I did not intend Dr. Marsden to know that I went to listen to his playing."

"Oh, then, he did know," said my father, with just a little amused smile; "you did not, I suppose, blow the bellows for him, Conny?"

"Oh, papa, you are too bad!" I exclaimed, intense vexation at the whole affair dyeing my cheeks. "I sat in a high

pew downstairs, and went out as quietly as a mouse. He overtook me in the street, and asked me, point-blank, where I had been, pretending that it was too late for me to be out alone. I had to choose between telling the exact truth, and declining to answer his question at all. I thought it best to tell the truth, as there was really nothing in it."

"Quite right, my dear," was the comment, in a more serious tone; "but of course it would flatter the young man, who evidently thinks a good deal of you, Conny, whatever you may think of him. And I must admit that there is something monstrously seductive about Marsden, apart from his medical genius. Any woman, whom he took the pains to woo, might be won without deeming it a shame or a weakness. You remember that it was an old prediction of mine that you

would be amongst his devoted admirers, if you came to know him."

"But admiration is not love, papa," I said, struggling, with bruised wings, to escape from the net in which I had entangled myself. "I do admire Dr. Marsden's intellect, as well as his wonderful musical talent; but even if he cared enough for me ever to ask me to marry him, I should say 'No.' We are not suited to each other, as life companions."

My father drew me to him and kissed me tenderly.

"My dear child, I am glad you have the wisdom to see this. I don't think you are, but I was afraid your heart was beginning to be touched, and when a woman's heart is touched, Conny, she usually gives wisdom and prudence a wide berth. I like Marsden as far as I can judge of him, but he is too much of a dreamer to make him the

husband I should choose for you. In all respects it is a good thing you are going away for awhile. The young fellow is certainly struck with you, and if you were much together this might deepen into a serious liking. He had better take the heiress by-and-by. She is racketing and energetic enough to counteract whatever morbid and sentimental tendencies there are in him."

I was spared the necessity of answering this (which of course I warmly assented to) by the entrance of my father's dinner and my own tea, and during the remainder of the evening Dr. Marsden did not, to my great relief, come into our conversation again.

The next week I was obliged to fix a day for spending at Woodleigh, and although that day was supposed to be known to nobody except my father and the Grahams

(I believe the Colonel was treacherous), at exactly a quarter of an hour before I had fixed to start, Dr. Marsden arrived, declaring that this was his day also, and that I could have no excuse for declining his escort.

So we walked along the familiar and very pretty country road together, enjoying the March sunshine, the fresh March breeze, and the almost imperceptible but cheering signs of coming Spring, in the budding of a few early trees and shrubs, in an occasional primrose half hidden under a sheltered hedge, and in the joyous shouting of the birds, which seemed to fill all the pure sweet air around us.

Having made up my mind so thoroughly, never, under any circumstances, to think of Dr. Marsden as a lover, never to encourage him in word or look or sight that denoted more than friendship, I did

not see-I would not see-why, for the very short time we should now be within reach of each other, I might not enjoy his society rationally and calmly. pleasant to talk to a man who had so original, so cultivated, and so imaginative a mind, and this pleasure was naturally enhanced by my knowing that he enjoyed, to quite the same extent, talking to me. I cannot exactly define what I felt in those very early days, when we were together and alone. It was a feeling so altogether new to me, that I did not understand, or seek to understand it. The nearest approach I can make to it in words is that it was a consciousness of having got out of life something I had never got out of it It was a consciousness of living before. in a fuller and deeper sense than I had hitherto lived, the acquisition of a strange faculty through which the earth was greener, the skies fairer, the whole creation more beauteous and wonderful to me than they had ever yet been.

That day at Woodleigh was one of almost unmingled pleasure. Mrs. Graham had rallied sufficiently from her terrible sadness to join the small domestic circle downstairs, and to be beguiled occasionally into an interest in the subjects discussed at table by Dr. Marsden, her husband, and myself. Then there was the stroll in the plantation after dinner, the search for wild flowers, the talk of the coming expedition in April, and last, but not least, the ravishing music to which we all listened without wearying till the player was weary himself, or thought he was scarcely getting his share out of the day's social enjoyment.

Colonel Graham, whose spirits invariably rose and fell according to those of

the wife he doted on, had been quite a sunbeam during the whole day, and this would have been all very well had his buoyancy not tempted him into showing how eager and zealous he was to promote a courtship between his esteemed friend and myself. His small subterfuges for leaving us together, for drawing us both out, in the way of conversation such as he fancied the other would appreciate, for showing off our respective advantages, would have been amusing had they been less embarrassing to me. I believe they gratified Dr. Marsden, though he took no advantage of them as regarded paying me extra attention; and indeed, throughout the entire day, he neither did nor said a single thing I could object to, or that he might not have said or done had it been an understood matter between us that friendship was to be our only bond of union to the end of time.

He was an epicure even in affairs of the heart, and would not risk the total withdrawal of what he was learning to think essential to his happiness, by seeking to woo it nearer to him before he was quite sure of its readiness to be won.

This I became aware of later, though I was not wholly blind to it even then.

Dr. Marsden, having been permitted to bring me to Woodleigh, had settled it in his own mind that he was to be my protector and companion home again, and believing that he had been looking forward all day to that quiet walk in the gloaming, I had not the courage (being such a soft-hearted fool) to tell him that my

father had arranged to come and fetch me. This was not done with any reference to Dr. Marsden, because neither my father nor myself knew that he would go with me to Woodleigh, but simply because the dear man had a little more leisure just at that time, and since the evening of our talk together, concerning the possibility of my ever leaving him, he had seemed tenderer and more solicitous over me than in any of the past days.

We had been all sitting chatting pleasantly together round a cosy little fire after tea, and it was only just beginning to get dark, when my father and his professional gig arrived to take me away. He sent word he could not come in, and begged I would make haste, as he had promised to go and see a new patient after his dinner.

My three companions all expressed surprise, having believed it an understood thing that Dr. Marsden was to escort me home. I said that, when my father arranged to fetch me, we had neither of us any idea that Dr. Marsden was to be a guest at Woodleigh on the same day.

"I told you my day and hour would be yours," the latter answered with some reproach, and a good deal of regret in his look and voice, "but I suppose it is easy to forget things that have no interest for us."

"I did not forget it," I said apologetically—for why should I give needless pain to anyone? "but I thought you were only intending a call at Woodleigh, and it was not certainly for me to send you word of the day I was coming."

I suppose my manner was kinder than my words, for he seemed partially satisfied, and was ready, when I came down dressed, to hand me to the waiting carriage, by the side of which he had been standing, while I was upstairs, talking to my father.

It was quite dusk now, though the evening was clear and fine, and after Dr. Marsden had said good night to us both he stood bare-headed, watching, with a singularly grave and even, I thought, anxious face, our retreating vehicle.

Of course I found this out by looking back, like Lot's wife, to the pleasant society I was leaving behind me. I don't know why I looked back; I did not expect to see Heber Marsden still outside the house; but as he stood there, with the March wind lifting the hair from his pale forehead, with one hand shading his eyes as they followed me—I knew it was me—in the gathering night shadows, my whole heart yearned towards the man I was keeping at bay, and a grave inward doubt came over me as to whether I should have

strength, unless we were speedily parted, to hold to my wise resolutions.

I believe that the same doubt must have suggested itself at the same time to my father, for after a tolerably long silence he abruptly exclaimed, as he gave his tired steed the whip,

"Conny, does it ever strike you what blind creatures we are when we struggle and fight against destiny, or, more correctly speaking, against Providence? I suppose this or something like it is implied in King Solomon's words, 'The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.'"

"Yes, papa," I said, rather absently, for my heart was thrilling with the new and strange idea he had suggested, with a wild, fanciful, extravagant hope—born in a moment and worthy to have as brief an existence—that I might be destined to

marry Heber Marsden, and to accept, with all its risks, life's best of wine, in spite of myself.

CHAPTER XVI.

MRS. RADCLIFF'S COMMISSION.

HAVE no idea what conversation took place between my father and Dr. Marsden during the few minutes they were together on that evening of my visit to Woodleigh; but I inferred that something, however trivial, must have been said, or hinted, by the former, which suggested to the latter that he would not be acceptable as a lover of mine. I inferred it, in the first place, from Dr. Marsden's grave and distressed look on the evening in question; and, in the next place, from the

fact that after that evening more than a week went by without my seeing or hearing anything of him, or of the old ladies at Abbeygates.

One night Colonel Graham came over to call on my father—he timed his visit so as to be sure of finding him at home—and I was quite sure that if he had not been sent as an actual ambassador from his friend, he had, at any rate, come entirely in that friend's interest. His great and indeed only object seemed to be to convince my father, who I am bound to say turned many a wistful glance towards a new, uncut April "monthly," that Heber Marsden was the one man in the world whom any parent might rejoice in securing for a son-in-law. He extolled his rare talents, he lauded his warmth and kindliness of heart, he dwelt on the sweetness and easiness of his temper, and he condescended to allude to his singular personal graces and advantages, till my dear, ugly, graceless father, half amused and three parts bored and tired, exclaimed, with a laugh,

"Hang it! my good Colonel, one would think you were the prime minister from a foreign court recommending the heir apparent of your country to a princess of these realms, I being that princess, since Conny sits back in a corner and neither speaks nor is spoken to on the subject. I am glad there is such a worthy and attractive young man to be had by some equally worthy and attractive young woman. But come, now, into my den, and have a pipe. Conny will give us a cup of coffee presently; she is the best coffee maker in all England."

The poor, dear Colonel, who was certainly a terrible blunderer, whenever he at-

tempted diplomacy, looked rather ashamed of the over-heat and zealousness of his championship, as he followed his host from the room, just turning, as he went, to give me a swift, meaning glance, which I interpreted into the words, "You see how hard I have been working for you and him, and what has come of it."

When he was gone, after having partaken of my coffee—the very best and strongest I could brew—my father grasped his book, with a great sigh of relief.

"Oh! Conny," he said, "what geese people make of themselves when they meddle in the affairs of others. The next time you see Dr. Marsden I should advise your putting into his hands 'The Courtship of Miles Standish,' or at least asking him, in the words of the sweet Puritan maiden, 'Why don't you speak for yourself, John?'"

I looked up quickly, with a face all a-glow, but the dear, tired man was deep in his magazine, or feigning to be so, and I was spared the necessity of saying anything.

After this, days and days went by, sweet, balmy, showery April days at last, without bringing a change of the most insignificant kind to me. I dared not beguile my time by going to listen to the organ playing again; I did not like, because of its guest, to call at Abbeygates; I had no excuse for another expedition to Woodleigh, and, upon the whole, the golden-footed hours were by no means so brief as in the good old days when I walked "in maiden meditation, fancy free."

It was about a week from the date at which I expected to join the Grahams in their Cambrian trip that an incident, not devoid of interest, did occur, to break the monotony of my lonely life, and to open my eyes a little wider than they had yet been opened.

It began, or rather was heralded, by a letter from Mildred, which, as it was not unreasonably long, I will give without abbreviations.

"MY DARLING CONSTANCE,

"I am writing from Florence, the most lovely city in the world, and one of which I would send you a full description if somebody had not hid away the guidebook I copy from, when I want to impress my friends with admiration and wonder concerning my organ of observation. I daresay you, who would not be imposed upon, will be more interested in hearing the result of that clever little mystification I had planned when last I wrote to you. Well, my dear wise Mentor, I have to

confess, with shame and confusion of face, that its success exceeded my utmost expectations, which means, in plain English, that Mildred Earnshaw, the rich lady's poor companion, in white muslin and a cheap sash, was just nowhere in fashionable society. In my new character, which I thought became me admirably, I went to at least five balls and a dozen mixed assemblies and conversaziones, and between them all I got for partners in dancing one boy of eighteen, with blue spectacles and pimples, and one aged veteran with a greasy wig, and teeth that rattled like castanets whenever he spoke to me. When there was no dancing, I sat by myself the whole evening, growing, every tedious and lagging hour, more disgusted with human nature, and repeating to myself, at cheerful intervals, a line from the veiled prophet of Khorassan, beginning'Yes, ye vile race, &c., &c., &c.'

Now you, my one friend and confidente. whose sweet, calm, Saxon face and fawnlike eyes would procure lovers by the score. were you as poor as Job at his worst estate. can form no idea of what depths of gloom I sink into as I contemplate my own loveless future. Why can't anybody care for me just a little? I am not exacting or greedy in the matter of affection, and I am willing to give far more than I receive. By-theby, I ought to tell you that my musicmaster, an Italian, and a middle-aged, interesting-looking man, is beginning to make expressive eyes at me, and to squeeze my fingers when he has occasion, or makes occasion, to remove them from one key of the piano to another. Of course he is aware that I shall have money, while he, though an undoubted count or baron of long descent, has not

enough to keep him in clean under-linen. Still, if he had showed the same signs of being interested in me, during the acting of my late part, I should have run away with him to a dead certainty. You will not be surprised, after all I have written with such utter abandonment of my weak self to your criticism and contempt—oh! my Constance, be pitiful to me, gazing down from your own calm height, if you can—but you will not be surprised to hear that I am looking forward to the almost immediate coming of Gilbert Radcliff, as a diversion, however small, from my own sad and brooding thoughts. He does not like me, but he is a young man, and an honest one, and I shall have somebody to talk to who is not, like his father, eaten up with bookishness and botany, or like his mother, who is so weary of life herself, that she increases the weariness and discontent of everybody around her. But now I am coming to the business part of my letter, with which, of course, I ought to have begun, only that, as old Flintoff, my guardian, says of me, I never shall or can be a business woman, and it is a thousand pities that so much money should be wasted on a mere butterfly of a girl. I have no doubt he thinks my father ought to have left it to him, or at any rate to have given him power to manage it all as long as I remain a spinster, and to dole it out to me in pennies and shillings.

"But, oh! how tedious I am growing, my dear patient victim, in letter-writing. Here we go then. When I indulge in a trifle of slang and vulgarity, I get on much faster. Mrs. Radcliff wants you to do a little delicate commission for her at the Grange. She has packed away, in a certain box in her bed-room, some very rare and priceless



old lace, which, it seems, almost a touch, of less fine and dainty hands than yours, would cause to drop to pieces in the twinkling of an eye. Now this lace is wanted for a fancy ball toilette, and Gilbert will bring it over if you will fetch it from the Grange and send it to that dutiful young The key of the box (which, gentleman. by-the-by, is of pine wood, and stands at the foot of Mrs. R.'s bed) is to be found in a secret drawer of the smallest table in the library, and this secret drawer you are to open, none of the servants being present, by sliding a little brass knob upwards, and then, sharply, to your right hand. Now, my Constance, you must bring your fine intelligence to bear upon any further details, for I have had more than enough of it, and am accused of have yawned six times in Mrs. Radcliff's face while she was giving me the above instructions.

"You must do the deed at once, if you do it at all, as Gilbert starts about the twentieth of this month. Mrs. Radcliff has just begged me to add that you can get up to the house by that private entrance which leads right through the park, and is a pleasant walk. The lodge people will admit you if you say Mrs. R. has given permission, and show your card. I don't know whether the great lady expects you to tramp it, but this is her message, and you will not hold me responsible for anything it may lack in courtesy or consideration.

- "I greet you, my best of friends, with a shower of kisses and loving words.
- "Always your devoted and most unworthy

" MILDRED EARNSHAW.

"P.S.—By-the-by, what do you think

of my aunts' present inmate? I had actually forgotten him till this moment. Do send me a full description of him—I cannot trust a syllable they write about their idol—and I have an impression that he is a conceited prig.

"Second P.S.—You are to send the lace, very carefully packed, to Gilbert's club, which is 'The Carlton.' I suppose that will be sufficient, as I have forgotten what part of London it is in, and I don't want to bother his lady mother again. I am going to the fancy ball, for which this lace is wanted, as Lady Clara Vere de Vere, but I shall have to proclaim my character before I act it, so few people here knowing anything of Tennyson. We shall try to coax Gilbert to go as 'the country heart' Lady Clara would fain break for pastime. Won't it be fun if he does?"

From the perusal of this letter I rose a thoughful if not a sadder and a wiser wo-There was a good deal in it of a man. suggestive nature, though, on the surface, there was to be discovered nothing but froth and bubble. Many ideas, many speculations, some convictions grew out of it in my own mind, but these must be kept for later sifting and consideration. Unlike Mildred, I was essentially a business woman, and therefore Mrs. Radcliff's commission was bound to have my earliest attention. I told my father about it in the evening, and he said he happened to have to drive past the very lodge commended to me, the next morning, and if an hour and a half would suffice for my errand he could both drop and pick me up there without the least inconvenience to himself.

It was settled thus, and in the recent

MRS. RADCLIFF'S COMMISSION.

dearth I had experienced of all external distractions, I quite looked forward to a walk on the morrow through the exquisite and now deserted park of the lovely old Grange.

CHAPTER XVII.

MY MYSTERIOUS BANQUET.

THE next day proved, contrary to my expectations and fears, lovely exceedingly, one of those days peculiar to mid-April—though it was scarcely that yet—when the sun is bright without being too scorching, when the south-west wind makes breathing the outer atmosphere a luxury beyond all telling, when every tree, every hedgerow, and the whole glad earth beneath our feet are instinct with budding life, which seems to have a mysterious affinity with our own, and to lift

our heavy or aching hearts into a region where Spring and peace will be eternal.

Something of this my dear father suggested to me, in his loving, reverent way, as we drove along the quiet, shaded road leading to the Grange, and to his own destination; and, catching a little of his spirit, though I was still far behind him in all yearnings towards the better land, I began my lonely walk, after he had set me down, in a very sober frame of mind, trying hard to feel that life has nobler, higher aims than the search and feverish longing for individual happiness.

My way led through a thick plantation where, on either side of me, under the graceful pines and firs and larches, clusters of big yellow primroses shone out from their dark green leaves, and the dog-violets and the pretty little lemon-coloured celandine

looked up modestly from the brown earth, and half uncurled ferns filled up every vacant space, and, over all, the leaves of the young trees made that delicious rustling murmur which, amongst the country's many sweetnesses, was the one I most delighted in. And after this came a stretch of open park where giant oaks and elms and beeches cast their shadows on the emerald turf, and projected their enormous snake-like roots in a curious and picturesque network for yards around them. Finally, a short avenue of limes, not yet in bloom; and then the house I was bound for.

My walk had been such an intense enjoyment to me, I had been able, through my ardent love of nature and the sweet Spring-time, so completely to exclude all reflections but those which came through the senses of sight and hearing that I

arrived at my journey's end in the happiest and serenest state of mind, and only just tired enough to make the prospect of a brief rest in the luxurious library very agreeable to me.

The servant who answered my ring at the bell was a female, who told me I was expected, and that the mistress had written word to the housekeeper to have some luncheon ready for me, which order had been obeyed; and would I therefore proceed at once to the dining-room and have the meal served to me?

I said that, if I took anything, it must be immediately, as I had to be back at the lodge in about an hour; so I went with my guide, whose face struck me as rather unnecessarily important and mysterious, to the grand, royal-looking drawing-room (half disposed to ask that my refreshment might be carried to the library, where my work had to be done, but timid of any suggestions where I felt so little at home), and after a five minutes' waiting and resting, was startled by the entrance of the butler with a tray of dainties that, for quality and variety, might have been set before the Queen herself, had she honoured the Grange by a passing visit.

I looked in actual dismay at the different dishes, as the man placed them artistically on the table, and though feeling miserably nervous even of him, I said, in a tone of earnest protestation,

"Oh! how could the housekeeper think of getting all these things for me? I am dreadfully distressed that she should have done so. Please don't leave them here. I shall only take a bit of cold chicken and a slice of bread."

"I hope you will change your mind,

miss," replied the butler, with profound respect, but also with an undoubted twitching at the corners of his well-trained lips, "otherwise it would be disappointing. I will, if you please, carve the chicken for you, but you must try the lobster mayonnaise with it, and afterwards, if nothing else can tempt you, the least bit, miss, of this delicate h-iced pudding."

"But indeed I have no time," I said, piteously, feeling as much tempted to cry as to laugh, for how could I sit contentedly regaling myself here, as was manifestly expected of me, without keeping my father waiting? "I have only about three quarters of an hour for everything at the Grange, and I have come on an errand for Mrs. Radcliff."

But the deeply respectful butler was too much for me. He gave me the wing of the chicken with the mayonnaise, and then put upon another plate a moderate slice of the iced pudding he had specially recommended. He also filled my glass with some old tawny-coloured port, having ascertained that I preferred that wine, and then discreetly retired, begging I would ring the bell when I was ready to be shown to the library.

The moment I was alone, the utter absurdity of the whole thing struck me so forcibly that I went off into a little spasmodic fit of laughter before I attempted to eat a mouthful of my dainty fare. But I did eat at last, nearly choking in my efforts to get it over quickly, and to reconcile my fear of wounding the overzealous housekeeper of the Grange with my desire to be in good time for my dear, busy, ever-punctual father.

I had barely half an hour left when I pushed away the plate that held the iced

pudding, and, with every tooth aching temporarily from its frigidity, got up to ring the bell as requested by the butler.

In two minutes that dignitary made his appearance, and having ascertained that I had done my best to oblige the very hospitable household, looked on me benignantly, and said I might now follow him to the library.

Arrived at the door of that apartment, he opened it gently, stood aside for me to enter, and then closed it noiselessly behind me. I went in a little way—it was a very long and rather narrow room, with a fireplace at either end—looked straight on, preparatory to my search for the smallest table, and to my infinite amazement discovered Gilbert Radcliff sitting at a desk, with a sheet of blank letter-paper spread out before him, a quill pen poised in his fingers, and his whole broad ruddy face

expressive of enjoyment both in possession and in expectancy.

He sprang up, on seeing me, and came to greet me with smiles and outstretched hands. I could do no less than offer him one of mine, which he grasped and wrung with such merciless impetuosity that I winced with pain, and cried involuntarily, and with twisted features, that he was hurting me.

"Oh, what a rough brute I am!" he said, relinquishing his grip, but looking still so pleased and happy that I could not believe he was sorry for his roughness. "Miss Newton, this is about the luckiest chance that ever came in my way, for I am, as a rule, the unluckiest dog in the universe. I came down here only the night before last, to fetch some things of my own that I want to take abroad with me, and the first thing I hear is that Miss Newton is

expected to-day to do some woman's errand for my mother. I should have called on you and Dr. Newton in any case," he added, growing more eager and demonstrative every second; "but it is far jollier to have you to myself here, for I have half a hundred things, do you know, to say to you."

"No, I was certainly not aware that you had anything to say to me," I replied, smiling, but wishing, with my whole heart, that this meeting had not occurred. "The mystery of my late regal banquet is, however, explained, and I have to thank you instead of your mother's housekeeper for such lavish but wholly superfluous hospitality. Did you think I was a cormorant or a shark, that you ordered so absurdly large a supply of costly viands for me?"

"No, indeed," he answered, looking a vol. II.

suspicion vexed at my evident non-appreciation of his delicate attention, "I only thought and hoped that your walk would have made you hungry—I am always ravenous after a morning's walk-and I told them to get you a few nice things. I would not allow you to know of my being here till you had eaten something, because I wasn't sure you might not be prudish, you know, and make a rush for it, and though I should have been awfully sorry to miss seeing you in any case, I would rather you had gone after a rest and refreshing, than before. But you will stay a bit now, won't you?" (this very pleadingly), "I must speak what is on my mind, and the sooner it is spoken the better. Sit down on this sofa—I'll prop you up with cushions and bring you a foot-stool-and if you don't wish to have me too near, I'll only stand beside you."

He evidently fancied my sense of pro-

priety was of a more irritable kind than was actually the case, but there was true delicacy in his attempts not to shock or alarm it, and I fully appreciated these.

"I have business to attend to first of all, Mr. Radcliff," I said, declining the sofa, and putting on my most practical and business-like aspect. "Please show me the smallest table in the room, and help me to open its secret drawer. Then I must go upstairs and find what your mother requires, and give it into your keeping at I don't really think, after all this, once. there will be much time for further delay on my part. I have to meet my father at the west lodge at half-past one exactly, and it is now within twenty-five minutes of it."

"Then you must let me walk with you —part of the way, at any rate," he said earnestly, and adding the last clause, I

imagined, because my face was not propitious. "I won't go a step beyond the limit you may assign me—I won't, upon my honour. You will have me for a companion just a little way, Miss Newton?"

I could not be so ungracious as to resist his pleading—had not Gilbert Radcliff been kind and friendly and attentive to me from the first, and had I not always professed to hold him in the highest esteem?—so I said he could come as far as the beginning of the plantation; and then we found the table and the key, and I went upstairs for the lace, with my wind in a state of considerable discomposure, and all that sweet serenity with which I had entered the Grange swallowed up in my wonderings and conjecturings as to what Gilbert Radcliff was going to say to me.

I might have guessed, you think, dear reader, and perhaps I had my suspicions, but things being as they were with me, these suspicions did not tend to raise my spirits, or to calm the mental fever which I felt every second growing upon me.

CHAPTER XVIII.

GILBERT'S WOOING AND ITS RESULT.

GILBERT was looking many degrees less bright when I joined him in the hall than he had done on first seeing me. His face was quite a grave and sombre one, as, with hat and gloves in hand, he stood patiently waiting my appearance.

I gave him the parcel containing the lace, and then he opened the massive hall doors (I had never been more struck than I was to-day with the very imposing aspect of the Grange), and we went out, through the lime avenue, into the sunny

park, neither of us speaking for the first few minutes, because I, for my part, had nothing to say, and he, I suspect, was growing nervous because of the seriousness, to him, of the speech he meditated.

When he did pluck up courage to begin, his voice betrayed such deep and earnest feeling that I was constrained to listen with feelings scarcely less deep, though in their depths there was reflected no image of the man walking beside me.

"Miss Newton," he said first, in his somewhat bluff, simple way, "will you be surprised to hear that I have been trying for the last six months an experiment connected with yourself? I have been trying whether absence from you, and mixing with a lot of other young ladies, more or less attractive, would enable me to forget you. It has not done so, but very much the reverse. I mean by this,

that I have proved my own feelings and tastes, and I have arrived at the conclusion that you are the one woman in the world I could be happy with, the only one—and so I have come down, before going over to the old people, to ask you to be my wife. I have a strong impression, and it has been growing stronger within the last half hour, that you don't care a straw about me; but I shall not let this discourage me utterly, if no other obstacle exists. It is not to be expected that you could, you know, after our short acquaintance, and you being so much cleverer than I am, and altogether the best and nicest girl in England. But I can wait and serve for you as patiently as ever Jacob waited and served for his Rachel, who, dear as she was to him, could not have been dearer than you have become to me. You see, you were the first

person who ever inspired in me the ambition to lead a good, true, useful life. You did not do it by preaching to me—I hate being preached to—but by just showing me unconsciously, through your own life, how excellent goodness and usefulness were. And now I want you nearer to me; I want you as a help, a companion, a friend. I am sick to death of indolence and pleasure seeking; but I am such a fool, and so ignorant, that I don't know how to set about working. I want you the only woman in the world I ever loved or could love—to teach me everything. know that you are the wife made for me—I believe I knew, or felt it anyhow, the very first time we met, and if you throw me over, and refuse to give me a hope for the future, I am afraid nothing will henceforth go right with me. One moment before you speak" (for I was longing to stop his simple, honest wooing, though my heart was aching sorely, and I was trembling all over at the thought of what I must say)-"one moment, while I add that you need not fear any long opposition on the part of my mother. It is true, as you know, that she had made up her mind that I was to marry Miss Earnshaw, but she is quite aware now that I shall never oblige her in that respect, and when she learns how fully I have set my heart on you-how dearly I love and esteem you—she will. give in, and receive you willingly as a daughter. I hope your good father will make no objection to me. If you can hold out the faintest hope to me-and, indeed, though I am doing it, being such a clumsy fellow, in an awfully clumsy fashion, I am pleading as for my life—I will come down and see him this evening. Now my long and, I am afraid, tedious saying is said. and I want your answer."

He was so terribly in earnest, that, though we were passing under some low thick trees as he finished, he had ceased from his inveterate habit of switching at them with his cane, and his ruddy face had become white with emotion.

Oh, how sorry I felt, how almost guilty, as, in a voice that I could not steady or control, I said, with barely a minute's pause after he had done,

"I wish I need not speak at all, since my words must give you pain. Your friendship and good opinion of me honour me more than I have ever in my whole life been honoured. I feel this to my very heart's core; but you would not care to take a wife who could give you nothing in return for your own noble gift of lavish trust and affection, and this would be my case. I put aside now the obstacles of our different social positions, and your

mother's certain objection to me, and, to save future misunderstandings, I name at once, though with a pain which you must give me credit for, the greater one that you will appreciate. Mr. Radcliff, I do not expect ever to marry—I am very happy with my father, and in fulfilling the easier duties of a single life; but if I should at any future time accept a husband, I must be able to love him with an entire and perfect love—I must be able to lay down my whole heart at his feet, and -and"-I stammered and hesitated like an idiot here, but went on desperately at last—"we are almost strangers yet."

I meant to put it much stronger, but my weak heart failed me at the last moment. I liked Gilbert Radcliff so thoroughly, I admired his manly, straightforward character so warmly, I sympathised so entirely with his energy and aspirations, and now, too, I was so grateful for his honourable and flattering sentiments towards myself, that I do not exaggerate when I say it was just torture to me to be obliged to give him pain instead of joy, and even while my lips framed the words of denial that I spoke, my heart within me cried, "Oh, the pity of it!"

"And is this my answer?" he said, after an awkward and distressing pause of a minute or two, during which we had entered the plantation, and I never dreamt of telling him to go; "or may I remind you that we need not continue to be strangers, and repeat that I will wait for you till we are both grey-headed, if such waiting can win me my wife? Miss Newton, you are too generous to keep me doubtful of your real meaning a single unnecessary instant. If you mean that you can never love me enough to marry

me, for pity's sake tell me so frankly and at once. Don't leave me on the rack through any mistaken compassion. If my bones are to be broken at last, it is only cruel to twist and torture them as a preparation for the final wrench."

"I am afraid, then, it is so," I stammered out, with a pulsation at my heart that made me quite faint for a moment; for I felt that I was voluntarily putting from me not only a destiny that might have secured me a large amount of earthly happiness and prosperity, but also that I was relinquishing a rare opportunity of helping a fellow-creature to a higher level than, by his own acknowledgment, he had ever before even thought of striving after. "But oh!" I went on, feebly as to my voice, but earnestly as to the sentiments I meant it to express, "you must try to forget that you ever cared for me other-

wise than as a friend or sister, and still determine to rise to the heights I always knew you to be capable of. It is surely far better to lead a good, true, noble life than merely to obtain the desires of our own hearts."

Was I not unconsciously saying this for myself as well as for him? It was, at any rate, the conviction, shaped into words, that had been colouring my meditations during the whole morning.

"Perhaps so," he replied, with no eagerness of assent in his dull, joyless voice; "but I had hoped to unite the two. Apart from you, I did not realise to such a great extent my own inferiority and unworthiness. I thought it possible that the depth and sincerity of my attachment might create for me a kindly feeling in your heart; but I see it all now; you are mentally and morally too far above me.

I know you are sorry for my sorrow, but you mean what you have said, and that is equivalent to a final rejection. Miss Newton, I have no right to complain, and I will not bore you with useless petitions and entreaties. I would rather leave on your mind an impression which will secure me your friendship, if we should ever meet again in this world; but I shall stay abroad when once I get there now. I have no longer any interest in my own country."

"Oh! don't do that," I said, with a quivering voice, and a sensation as if the solid earth we were treading on was crumbling under my feet; "at least, don't do it on my account—I am miserable enough at the trouble I have already brought on you; I feel the great honour you have done me all too much for me; I am bewildered, stupefied, and, so far from any consciousness of superiority, I can

only think of myself as fathoms deep beneath you who, in your generous affection, were willing to overlook my lowlier social position and everything that would have made me, in the world's eye, as well as in your parents' estimation, an unfit wife for you. Mr. Radcliff, we must part here' (for the lodge gates were in sight); "but let it be as friends, and while I take with me a profoundly grateful remembrance of your most flattering esteem, do you take with you a forgetfulness of all that has passed between us to-day, except my assurance that I shall always value your friendship, if you will keep it for me, as one of my dearest earthly blessings."

If these my last words to the man whose heart I was making heavy, if not bitter, were a little stiff and formal, you must bear in mind, dear reader, how very difficult it was to say anything, under the cirvol. II.

cumstances, that should soothe and comfort him, without giving him a hope that I might one day return his attachment. But Gilbert Radcliff was essentially a very humble-minded man. It had never even occurred to him to ask me if I cared for anyone else, such a supreme obstacle being quite unnecessary, in his view of the matter, to account for my admitted inability to care for him.

He stood still as I finished speaking, and, without a word, grasped the hand I gave him in both his own. The close, fervent pressure in which he held it, was a most comprehensive and eloquent answer to the parting appeal I had made. I don't think he could have said much in any case. His face was piteously white, and the usually laughing lips had a tremulous motion about them that nearly choked me to see.

Finally, he let my hand drop (I believe if he had not done so I should, in my infinite penitence and sorrow, have left it where it was till we were both turned into stone), murmured, "God for ever bless you!" and went from me, at a swift pace, under the shadowing trees.

I walked on then myself, with dim eyes, and a vague sense that the leaves above my head were rustling and the birds singing just as they had done in the earlier morning, but only impressing me now with a deeper sense of sadness and pain. How could I be otherwise than sad and doubtful of my own wisdom when I had put from me an earthly heritage that contained such brilliant promise, and all because my heart, in its foolishness, was cleaving to a man whom, actually, I esteemed less than I esteemed Gilbert Radcliff.

But it was done, and though I called myself some bitter names, and though I stood for a minute or two looking round on all the fair domain I was leaving behind me, and trying to realize what it would have been one day to have it for my own, I knew, beyond all doubting, that I should have given the same answer had the whole thing been instantly, or at any future time, re-acted.

The glamour of a first love was upon me; I had listened hungrily to the voice of the charmer, and though a thousand more tempting destinies than the one I had just let slip, had been pressed on my acceptance, I should have said the same "No" to them all.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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